



United States  
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June 2010



# The Great 1910 Fires of Idaho and Montana

## Day Trip Guide to Historic Sites in Idaho and Montana



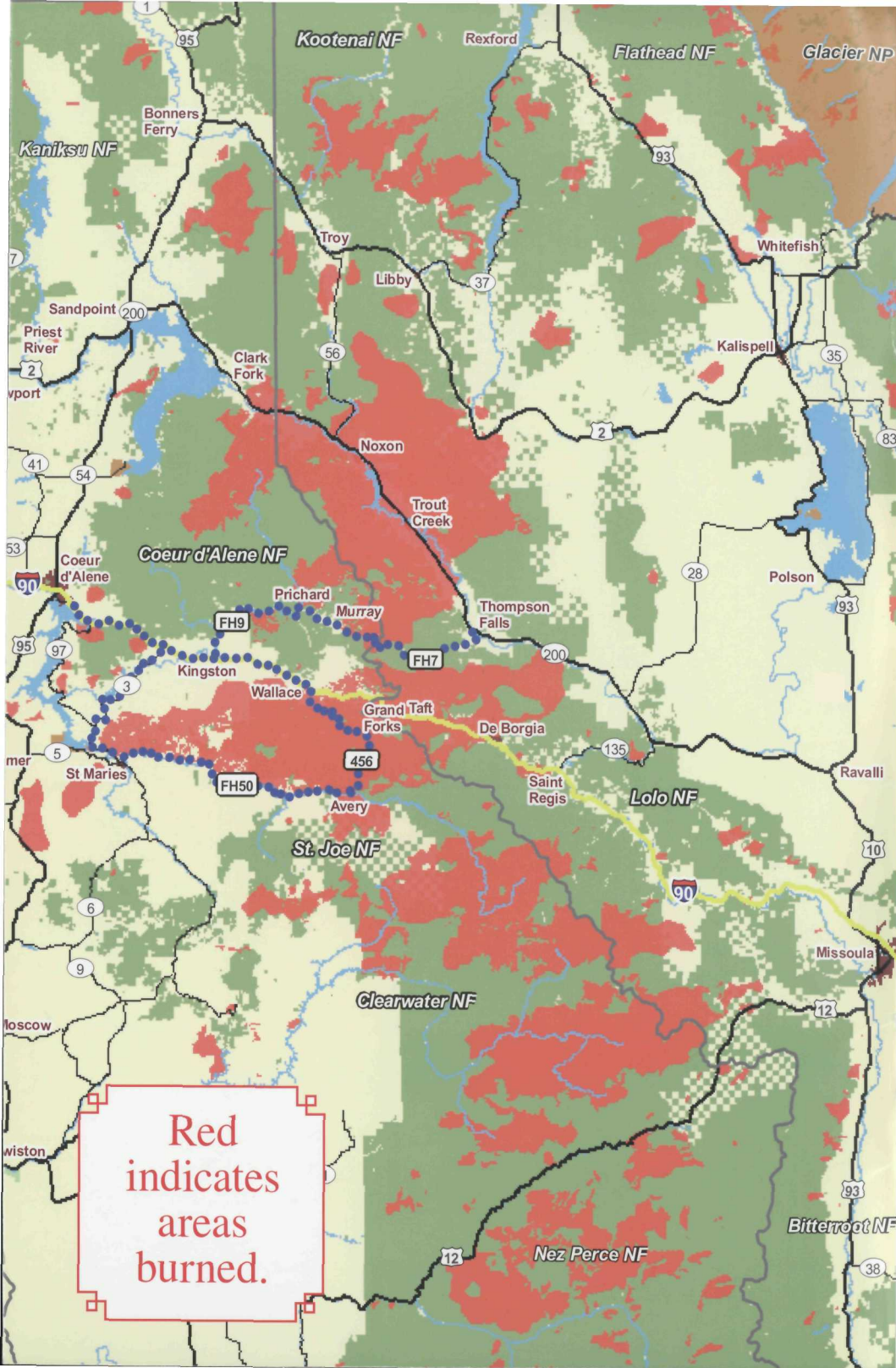
# 1910 FIRES

HEROES. HERITAGE. RENEWAL.

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2010 COMMEMORATION





# The Great 1910 Fires of Idaho and Montana

## Day Trip Guide to Historic Sites in Idaho and Montana



**Commemoration Team**  
Employees of Lolo, Kootenai, and Idaho Panhandle National Forests

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**Northern Region, June 2010**

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# The 1910 Fires— The Land

**T**he 1910 Fires were a pivotal event in western and U.S. history affecting thousands of people and forging the Forest Service's early fire suppression policy. The fires also spurred national interest in conservation and the need for scientific research into fires. This research now includes fire prevention, the role of fire in the nation's varied ecosystems, forest insects and diseases, tree genetics, timber management, and silviculture.

Approximately eight billion board feet of timber burned in the fires. The intense heat severely damaged entire watersheds across nearly three million acres. One third of the town of Wallace Idaho burned and the towns of Mullan and Avery Idaho were barely saved by residents who set backburns. A backburn ignites the trees, grass and brush in front of an oncoming wildfire which slows or stops a fire by robbing it of burnable fuels.



Burned over white pine in the St. Joe River drainage. Photo by R.H. McKay

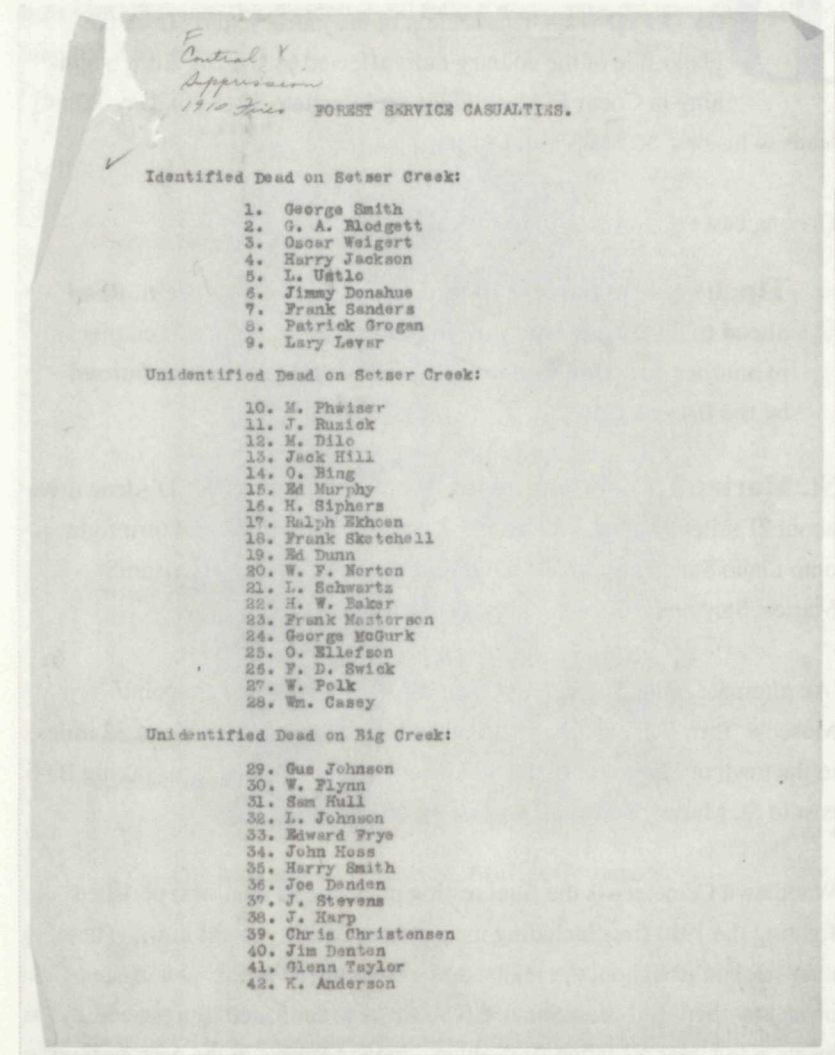
## The 1910 Fires— The People

**M**any families in north Idaho and western Montana were affected by the fires of 1910. The most awe-inspiring event that occurred is often referred to as the “Big Blowup,” a 36-hour firestorm that burned nearly three million acres on August 20 and August 21, 1910.



The firefighter memorial at St. Maries

Although numbers vary, it is believed that 85 people died in the fire and most were Forest Service firefighters. Both Wallace and St. Maries Idaho honor these fallen firefighters. Woodlawn Cemetery in St. Maries marks these firefighters' graves in concentric circles with a large granite marker in their midst, chiseled to resemble a large flame. Some names are unknown to this day.



A partial list of Forest Service casualties from the 1910 Fires.



## 1910 Fires Commemoration Sites— Idaho

**Day Trip #1**—This section of the journey starts from the Idaho side of the country most affected by the Big Burn beginning in Coeur D'Alene Idaho on Interstate 90 (I-90). Day Trip #1 leads to historic St. Maries and Avery, Idaho.

Driving east are a variety of historical stops to choose from.

**Tip:** It's best to have a full tank of gas before you begin. Read ahead to determine how your individual interests might connect to another day trip through a different section of country burned by the fires of 1910.

**St. Maries, ID—Woodlawn Cemetery:** From Coeur D'Alene drive about 21 miles east toward Kellogg. Leave I-90 at Exit 34 and turn right onto Idaho State Highway 3 (ID-3) leading to Rose Lake/Harrison/St. Maries. Stay on ID 3 for 38 miles to reach St. Maries.

An alternate route is to exit in Coeur d'Alene headed to Sandpoint/Moscow. Turn left, heading south on US-95, continue south about 32 miles to the town of Plummer. In the middle of Plummer follow signs taking ID-5 east to St. Maries. Stay on ID-5 east the length of the trip.

Woodlawn Cemetery is the final resting place for 58 men who perished fighting the 1910 fires including many whose identity is unknown. These men served throughout the region and were interred in this plot of land owned by the U.S. Forest Service. The site was dedicated as a peaceful location to honor all fallen firefighters who are heroes in the past, present and future.

The cemetery can be reached from St. Maries by traveling west out of town towards Plummer. Approximately 0.8 miles on ID 5 from the city center,

turn south/left into the cemetery and follow the road to the top of the hill (about 0.2 miles).



The Memorial Stone at St. Maries Cemetery.

On August 20 2010, a 1910 Forest Firefighter Memorial will be rededicated at this site paying tribute to the 58 plots that encircle the original memorial. An interpretive sign is located directly across from the entrance to the cemetery. More information is provided at the cemetery about the fires of 1910 along with a Steam Donkey used for logging during the early days of timber harvest on the St. Joe National Forest (NF). The St. Joe NF is now part of the larger Idaho Panhandle NF.



**St. Maries, ID: The Hughes House**—Seated at the city center of St. Maries on the corner of Sixth Street and Main Avenue is the Hughes log house built in 1902. It started out as a men’s club and then in 1906, G.S. “Doc” Thompson bought the house and used part of it as his office and treatment center. The house survived the 1910 Fires. In the 1920’s Thompson lost his building to the Lumberman’s State Bank of Kootenai County and this charming log house began to suffer deterioration as a rental. In 1926 Raleigh Hughes purchased the home and began years of loving restoration and improvements. In 1989 the Centennial Committee purchased the home from the Hughes family. It opened as the Hughes House Historical Museum on June 18 1990 and serves as a historic museum and excellent example for the types of homes found in the area. Open Wednesday through Sunday noon-4 p.m.

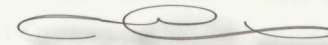


Hughes House was built in 1902.

## On the Road from St. Maries to Avery

**Tip:** Set your odometer to view specific points of interest.

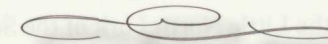
Traveling to Avery, Idaho takes one to two hours, depending upon the number of stops. From St. Maries follow signs out of town on ID-3, and after about one-half mile north turn right towards Avery along St. Joe River Road/Forest Highway 50 (FH 50). Along this road note the hillsides to the north/left compared to the south side of the river. The south side of the river burned with a lower intensity in 1910 but since this slope is south facing and exposed to more of nature’s elements, re-growth tends to be at a slower rate.



In 1967, Orlando Scott of St. Maries wrote the following about his memory of watching the August 1910 fire move through Thomas

Creek: “It was then that we saw a wall of bright red flame leap from the west ridge to the east ridge of Thomas Creek, a mile wide jump, in a moment of time. Then the flames sucked down into the depths of the canyon of

Thomas Creek and swept upward toward Round Tom Mountain in a seething caldron of falling trees, with soot and smoke and flaming branches soaring high into the air. Acres of timber went down in a flash and no power on earth could save it...”





About ten miles up the road is the Forest Service Shadowy St. Joe Camp-ground. \*Facilities are available.\*

Traveling along the St. Joe River Road/FH 50, you'll see another road to the south/right that follows the St. Joe River. This is the old Milwaukie railroad route used in 1910 to transport people fleeing the fires from Avery. The railroad had just opened one year prior to the fires in 1909.

After approximately 13 miles, turn off to St. Joe City. Entering the town, imagine August 20, 1910 when the fires are growing along the hills surrounding the city with 40 to 75 mile an hour winds pushing the fire upstream towards Avery. In 1910 St. Joe was a bustling city known as the gateway to the national forest.



The after effects of one of the 1910 Fires, the Hurricane Fire, on a heavy stand of white pine on the Little North Fork of the St. Joe River. *Photo by R. H. McKay.*

Continuing on the St. Joe River Road, Avery Falls Creek appears within just a couple of miles and a little further is the old bridge crossing the river. This bridge was also once the part of the Milwaukie Railroad route.

The fires of 1910 spread beyond the Trout Creek drainage down into the Big Creek drainage where homesteaders lost their cabins and much of their timber. The resource loss is still evident today with fewer acres of white pine trees in the drainage.

The next portion of road winds through spectacular wildlife viewing areas. Watch for moose and bald eagles along Moose Creek!

At the turn off to Calder, a side route starts here to Big Creek and a Civilian Conservation Corp (CCC) camp site. At the time of the fires Calder was called Elk Prairie. The town escaped the fire but the forest north of town burned. Milwaukee lumber company salvaged fire-killed timber for the next several years.

**IN MEMORIAM:** Delbert E. Rich was among the 78 fire-fighters who lost their lives in the Great 1910 Fires. \*At Big Creek, in the Coeur d'Alene forest, seven men died when they took refuge in a prospect hole. Three others there were killed by an immense falling pine.\* (Rich died at Big Creek.)





The pit in Big Creek where firefighters died on the night of August 20. Photo by J.B. Halm.

In 1910 at the mouth of Big Creek stood Herrick, Idaho where the Milwaukee railroad housed sectionmen and built rail tracks to move the choice white pine timber. Unfortunately the fires of 1910 took out the tracks and the white pine. In the 1930's the area along Big Creek was used for a large Civilian Conservation Corp (CCC) camp. Today the old CCC facility is a Forest Service campground.

28 miles towards Avery, settler Joseph Beauchamp's homestead appears in an open two-acre meadow. At this site, John Bell and his crew of 50 men tried to outlast the roaring flames. While accounts vary, ten firefighters and three homesteaders are believed to have perished here.



1922, Coeur d'Alene NF. The Beauchamp Ranch on the east fork of Big Creek, site of 13 fatalities. Photo by E.C. Pulaski.

Another crew led by 22 year-old Forest Service guard Lee Hollingshead was called in from the Skookum Creek Fire. The crew was sent nine miles up Big Creek to the West Fork where they set up camp with the fire only a mile away. On August 20, 1910, the winds hit and the fire blew up trapping the men on three sides and killing 18 men who ran into a cabin for shelter.



The rest of Hollingshead's crew left the area through the already burned part of the landscape. Today's firefighters call that move 'escaping to the black'.

At about 28 miles towards Avery is the Huckleberry Campground managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). \*Facilities are available.\* The cedar snag at the campground is an excellent example of the size of some snags left by the 1910 fire. A snag is a dead standing tree. This particular snag burned during a more recent fire event.

**History Note:** 30.9 miles: Moe's Hole Mill site. The mill has been an important site providing lumber and jobs to the area since 1951 when it was built by Erling Moe. In the 1970's the mill burned, but a concrete pier can still be seen as you drive up river. At 31.3 miles: Spring Creek. This was originally a CCC camp site.

Marble Creek appears at about 33.5 miles into this route providing an excellent historical perspective on the way early logging helped shape this drainage. This area is the gateway to one of the largest stands of white pine trees remaining in the Inland Northwest and was largely untouched by most of the fires of 1910. The homesteads at the mouth of Marble creek where it flows into the St. Joe River were not so fortunate and were destroyed by the fires.

At the bridge crossing the St. Joe River, the road now follows on top of the old Milwaukie railroad bed. This railroad was the main escape route for

those fleeing Avery from the burning hillsides. The bridges and trestles that connected much of the railroad route were mostly destroyed by the fires.



1910 Coeur d'Alene NF. The Milwaukee Railroad loop on the North Fork of the St. Joe River. Most of the basin was burned including the railroad trestle pictured here. *Photo by R.H. McKay.*

Slate Creek drainage appears around mile marker 39, followed in one mile by Hoyt Flat. This area was also once a CCC camp and is now a Forest Service field office.

**The Forest Service Avery office, located six miles west of Avery, is open to visitors 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.** Monday through Friday year round and open weekends in 2010 from Memorial Day through Labor Day. \*Facilities are available.\*



**History Note:** A couple miles up the road is Rock Creek. Named for a former USFS ranger William Rock this local boy led a crew of seventy men through the Big Burn. Rock and the men were cut off from the trail to Avery. Keeping calm, they spent the night in a burned over meadow north of Avery. One man panicked, fleeing into the night and his body was discovered the following morning after he apparently shot himself twice in the chest. Rock and the rest of his crew survived the fire.

At mile marker 43, pull into the Storm Creek turnout to read the interpretative sign, The Mystery of the Lost Fire Crew about 28 firefighters who died here. Two miles more at mile marker 45 is Setzer Creek. It was at Setzer creek where a deputy sheriff, sent by Forest Service Avery District Ranger Ralph Debit, told another 70-man crew to head for Avery. Most obeyed, but 28 stayed. These were the men of the Lost Fire Crew.

**In MEMORIUM:** O. Ellefsen was among the 78 firefighters who lost their lives in the Great 1910 Fire. He was trapped at Setzer Creek near Avery, Idaho, along with others. Some firefighters soaked themselves in the creeks, some sought refuge in mines, and others backtracked to previously burned areas praying the flame, heat, and smoke would not overtake them.



1910 St. Joe NF. September, Setzer Creek, disinterred bodies prepared for transportation and burial at St Maries. Photo by J.B. Halm.

**History Note:** Just one mile up the road is a local area known as Lower Landing. This area was used to house materials and equipment for the Milwaukie railroad. It burned in 1910. During the Great Depression the landing was also used as a CCC camp. The area across the road to the left/north leading to the town of Avery was the main camp for Japanese railroad workers. For several years the town folks of Avery looked forward to celebrating the Emperor of Japan's birthday on November 3.



Just up the road you are welcomed to the town of Avery. To your left/north you can see the Avery Community Center, once the site of the Milwaukee railroad depot. The location currently houses the post office and museum. Stop and look at the Fishpond (circa 1910) and feed the rainbow trout. Just remember no fishing please!



**Avery is your last stop for gas!**

In 1910 there were 250 people living in Avery. Today there are less than sixty permanent residents with an increase in population in the summer. While still a small town, Avery is a popular destination for visitors to fish, hunt, camp and hike. During the 1910 Fires, pack trains of mules were used to get the few available supplies to firefighters in the area.

**OPTIONAL ADDITIONAL DRIVE:** This is about 25 miles of forest road, some portions unpaved, so please choose wisely and drive slowly.

**History Note:** Black troops of the 25th Infantry out of Fort Wright in Spokane were detailed to Avery to fight fire and to maintain order through the hectic days of the 1910 fire. As fires raged around the town, the soldiers patrolled to protect the residents and property in Avery.



**Ranger Ralph DeBitt (arrow) and the Buffalo Soldiers from the 25th Infantry.** Photo from the North Idaho Museum.

From Avery you can take Forest Service Road 456, also known as Moon Pass Road to Wallace Idaho.

About ten miles out of Avery on Moon Pass Road is the Cedar Graveyard, also locally known as “Ghost Cedars.” At Cedar Graveyard are numerous large cedar snags (standing dead cedars) killed in the 1910 Fires. They are located along the North Fork St. Joe River wetlands area.

Historically in an average summer, these river bottom wetlands are too moist to carry a forest fire even when the surrounding hillsides are dry enough to burn. In early 1910, this bottomland was filled with an old growth cedar forest. These cedars did burn due to the severity of the drought and heat conditions that contributed to the severity of the 1910 Fires. Many of these cedar trees were 300 – 500 years in 1910.



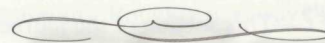


Ghost Cedar snags in the St. Joe. Photo by C. H. Gregory

A fire of this magnitude that burns everything in its path with great intensity is called a stand-replacing wildfire.

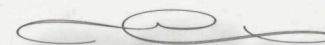
The young forest now growing on the surrounding mountainsides regenerated since the 1910 Fire. But once the river bottom cedars were killed, the water table rose, and dense sedges, forbs, and shrubs filled in the newly open ground. Gophers and other rodents fed on the sedges and forbs, populating in such numbers that they also ate any tree seedling that started to grow. Without the cover of trees, this bottomland is also subject to severe spring and fall frosts that can kill young starter cedar trees.

The moist river bottoms which are normally the most fire-resistant locations and support the biggest and oldest trees, also take longer to naturally regenerate once burned in a stand-replacing wildfire.



**“Then came that fateful 20th of August. For two days the wind blew a gale from the southwest. All along the line, from north of the Canadian boundary south to the Salmon the gale blew. Little fires picked up into big ones. Fire lines which had been held for days melted away under the fierce blast. The sky turned a ghastly yellow, and at four o’clock it was black dark ahead of the advancing flames. The heat of the fire and the great masses of flaming gas created great whirlwinds which mowed down swaths of trees in advance of the flames.”**

**1942 - Elers Koch,  
Lolo Forest Supervisor in 1910**





## 1910 Fires Commemoration Sites— Idaho

**Day Trip #2**—This section of the journey features the Idaho side of the landscapes most affected by the Big Burn beginning in Coeur D'Alene on Interstate 90 and continuing to Wallace. Historical Wallace is considered by many the heart of the 1910 Fires.



1910 Coeur d'Alene NF. Burned over area in Wallace near the ruins of the foundry. The cottage on the hillside (left) is the only one left standing in town. *Photo by R.H. McKay.*

**Wallace, ID: Nine Mile Cemetery.** From Coeur D'Alene, drive about 46 miles east to Wallace on I-90. Take Exit 61 off I-90 into town. The street heading into town is Front Street/Old Hwy 10. Continue on this street as it curves through town. Downtown Wallace is full of historical character

## 1910 Fires Commemoration Sites—Idaho—Day Trip #2

featuring a variety of museums. Roughly part way through Wallace is 6th Street. Take 6th towards I-90, traveling underneath the freeway. The road turns into Forest Service Road 456 also locally known as Nine Mile Creek Road/Dobson Pass Road, and continue northeast for about a mile. The road into the cemetery is on the left and is called Cemetery Road. The cemetery is operated under the Nine Mile Cemetery Association, Inc

Nine Mile Cemetery is a traditional historic cemetery located on a wooded hillside. It is the final resting space for ten firefighters and some civilians who died in the 1910 Fires.



Nine Mile Cemetery, Wallace Idaho.



**IN MEMORIAM:** Buried in the Nine Mile Cemetery is John J. Boyd. A pioneer of Shoshone County Idaho, Boyd perished in the town of Wallace by succumbing to the smoke of the 1910 Fires which also came to be known as “The Big Burn.” John had been an agent for the Oregon Railroad & Navigation Company. He chose to return to his home and try to walk out with his pet parrot instead of boarding the rescue train for Spokane. No pets were allowed, just women, children, disabled, and elderly people with one small bag of belongings each. John’s son was one of the fire chiefs evacuating Wallace and had last seen his father walking toward the rescue train, unaware John would later turn around and go home after his pet bird.

**!!Adventure Seeking:** The Pulaski Tunnel Trail: Stop into the Wallace Visitor’s Center just off I-90 at Exit 61 for directions and a brochure.

**Pulaski Tunnel Trail:** Make sure you have plenty of water and are physically capable of hiking this trail. This trail can be challenging due to some steep sections.

From July 10 – August 22 on Saturdays at 10:00 a.m. and Sundays at 1:00 p.m. locally hosted hikes along this trail will take place. Call the Wallace Visitors Center in advance for directions to site at 208-753-7151.

**Note:** August 21, 2010 no hike will be hosted at 10:00 a.m. due to 1910 Commemoration Events at Wallace Visitors Center.

This Forest Service trail follows the West Fork of Placer Creek up a cool and wooded canyon past waterfalls, cascades, and richly varied flora. The trail begins at a well-marked trailhead about a mile south of Wallace, soon after King Street leaves Wallace’s city limits. Both the trail and the mine are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The trail’s two-mile course ultimately brings hikers to a spot across the creek from the historic Pulaski Tunnel, the abandoned mine where “Big Ed” Pulaski saved all but six of his 45-man firefighting crew in the Great Fires of 1910. The site’s peaceful and idyllic setting belies the terrible events that etched this place into history a hundred years ago. The trail also honors the courage, dedication, and self-sacrifice of firefighters past, present, and future.



Pulaski Trailhead.



**History Note:** Edward 'Big Ed' Pulaski was an inventor, hero of the 1910 Fires and one of the first US Forest Service Rangers. He developed the Pulaski tool that is still used today in firefighting. In 1910 Pulaski saved the lives of 39 firefighters by holding his crew of 45 at gunpoint in abandoned mine tunnel near Wallace, Idaho. All the men were overcome by smoke and became unconscious. Six of the men died. From that day Pulaski carried the scars on his hands and face, from keeping guard at tunnel entrance. All tunnel survivors spent months recovering and had respiratory difficulties for the remainder of their lives. Pulaski arrived in Wallace, Idaho at age sixteen working in mines and mills for 25 years. He was a US Forest Service Ranger for two years when the 1910 Big Burn occurred. He and his wife Emma had a daughter. Ed and Emma Pulaski are buried in the Forest Cemetery in Coeur D'Alene Idaho.



Edward J. Pulaski.

## 1910 Fires Commemoration Sites— Montana

**D**ay Trip # 3 and 4—This is a decision point. **Please read ahead** and decide which you would like to do first.

From Wallace, Idaho you can travel on I-90 over Lookout Pass and into Montana to visit 1910 Commemorative sites or travel back west a few miles on I-90 to the Kingston Exit and travel over Thompson Pass to additional sites in Sanders County Montana.

**Day Trip #3**—Wallace over Thompson Pass to Thompson Falls and Trout Creek, Montana.

From Wallace drive west on I-90 to the Kingston Exit 43, turn south and follow the signs to Pritchard and Murray. The road that intersects with the off ramp is locally known as the Coeur D'Alene River Rd or Forest Service Road 208. Drive approximately 22-25 miles as this road meanders along the Coeur d'Alene River. Take a right turn onto Forest Service Road 9 also called Prichard Creek Road. Continue approximately seven miles to the small town of Murray. In this seven mile stretch is an intersection with another road. Continue on Prichard Creek Road to the left. From Murray the road will turn into Thompson Pass road and will wind up and over crossing into Montana.

Travelers over Thompson Pass will enjoy the silence, crisp mountain air and the opportunity to hike to one of three nearby lakes at the pass summit. Thompson Pass provides an interesting contrast to the rest of the 1910 day trip sites. A Forest Service silvicultural survey was completed on 141 acres in the Thompson Pass area in 1995 revealing that much of Thompson Pass was spared during the fires of 1910.



Survey data also found mountain hemlock, western larch, Engelmann spruce and white pine trees 200 – 300 years old with the oldest about 340 years old. This unique area reveals the small section of old growth surrounded by the landscapes damaged in the 1910 Fires. Looking out over the terrain on the Idaho side of Thompson pass, it's easy to see how the this part of the 1910 Fire area and current fires generally burn in mosaic patterns leaving islands of unburned trees that regenerate naturally determining what types of forested vegetation currently grow at the site.

The summit divides the Coeur d'Alene River Ranger District on the Idaho Panhandle NF and the Plains-Thompson Falls Ranger District on the Lolo NF in Montana.

**!!Adventure Seeking:** At this altitude, make sure you have plenty of water and are physically capable of a moderate level hike as the air is thinner.

At the top of Thompson Pass there are several small day hikes. If visitors are interested in one of the several options atop Thompson Pass, contact Plains/Thompson Falls Ranger District at 406-826-3821 PRIOR to hiking to determine the appropriate adventure for you.

A recommended moderate mountain hike into Blossom Lake is one half mile west of Thompson Pass on the Montana side. This well-developed trail is two miles (four miles round trip) through the old growth to a mountain lake.



Thompson Pass sign.

Continuing on the Montana side of Thompson Pass, Prospect Creek Road leads to the intersection of MT Hwy 200. Turn right for about two miles to reach Thompson Falls. \*Full services are available\*. Turning left on MT Hwy 200 leads to the town of Trout Creek and two additional historic sites to conclude Day Trip # 3.

### **Mountain Meadows Ranch and Little Beaver Creek**

**Hillside:** Traveling towards Trout Creek on MT Hwy 200, at approximately mile marker 44 turn west onto Little Beaver Creek Road. Continue for approximately 3.5 miles, note the west side of the creek is a peculiar hillside with one side nearly bald and the other side forested. This bald hillside burned in the fires of 1910 and again in 1930 when workers



from the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) fought the fire. It has only recently started to recover naturally.

The next site on the trip is the Mountain Meadows Ranch owned by Bill and Helen Meadows. This ranch is approximately one more mile from the bald hillside (approximately 4.5 miles down Little Beaver Creek Road). There is a large barn built in 1908 that survived the fires of 1910 and is available for viewing appointments by calling Bill and Helen Meadows at 1-406-827-3578 between Memorial Weekend and Labor Day Weekend.



Mountain Meadows Ranch barn.

**Butte Homestead:** Returning to MT Hwy 200, continue one-half mile towards Trout Creek. This site is very near to the Little Beaver Creek road turnoff. Between mile marker 44 and 45 on the west side of MT Hwy 200 there will be a white homestead built in the late 1890's. This homestead is locally known as the Butte Homestead and survived the fires of 1910. The homestead was kept within the family and is now owned by the great-great granddaughter of the original settler. The homestead is open **by appointment only by calling 1-406-827-9997 between Memorial Weekend and Labor Day Weekend.**



Butte homestead.



**ADDITIONAL OPTIONAL DRIVE:** Sex Peak Lookout, Kootenai National Forest

**Tip:** Roads to Sex peak are narrow and winding in some spots, so caution is advised! The lookout is accessible by car but you must take your time getting there and be alert for logging or visitor traffic.

Sex Peak Lookout is at 5,798 feet. Sex Peak was built in the early 1920's and rebuilt in the 1940's. Lookouts were common following the 1910 Fires as the Forest Service initiated programs for fire detection and protection. Over 150 high vantage spots became lookout points on the Cabinet National Forest now part of the Kootenai National Forest. Few remain today but Sex Peak captures the view and lifestyle fire guards experienced back in the decades when lookouts were staffed.

**History Note:** The peak was named by forester I.V. Anderson and Harry Baker, supervisor of the Cabinet National Forest in the 1920's. The rumor most widely believed is that it was named after their topic of conversation that day. It lived up to its name when a patrol plane buzzed the lookout at eye level in the 1960's and found two lovers stark naked on the rocks. It was refurbished and placed on the Recreation Rental program in 1986, and is listed on the National Historic Lookout Register.



Sex Peak.

Access Sex Peak Lookout by traveling on MT Hwy 200 and turning south onto Forest Service Road 1740 or locally known as Faro Road. This turnoff is between mile markers 37-38. Faro Road intersects Beaver Creek Road (Forest Service Road 152). Turn right at the stop sign and follow Road 152 for about ten miles to Forest Service Road 2222 (on the right). This road will wind up the mountain and once at an intersection continue on the "middle" Road 2222. Road 2222 will intersect with Road 2222B and the gate to the lookout. If the gate is open, you can drive to Sex Peak Lookout.

Sex Peak Lookout is part of the Kootenai National Forest lookout/cabin rental program. If renters are present the gate will probably be locked. Information on Forest Service rentals is available at <recreation.gov>. For specific site information, log on to the individual forest webpage and look under recreation.



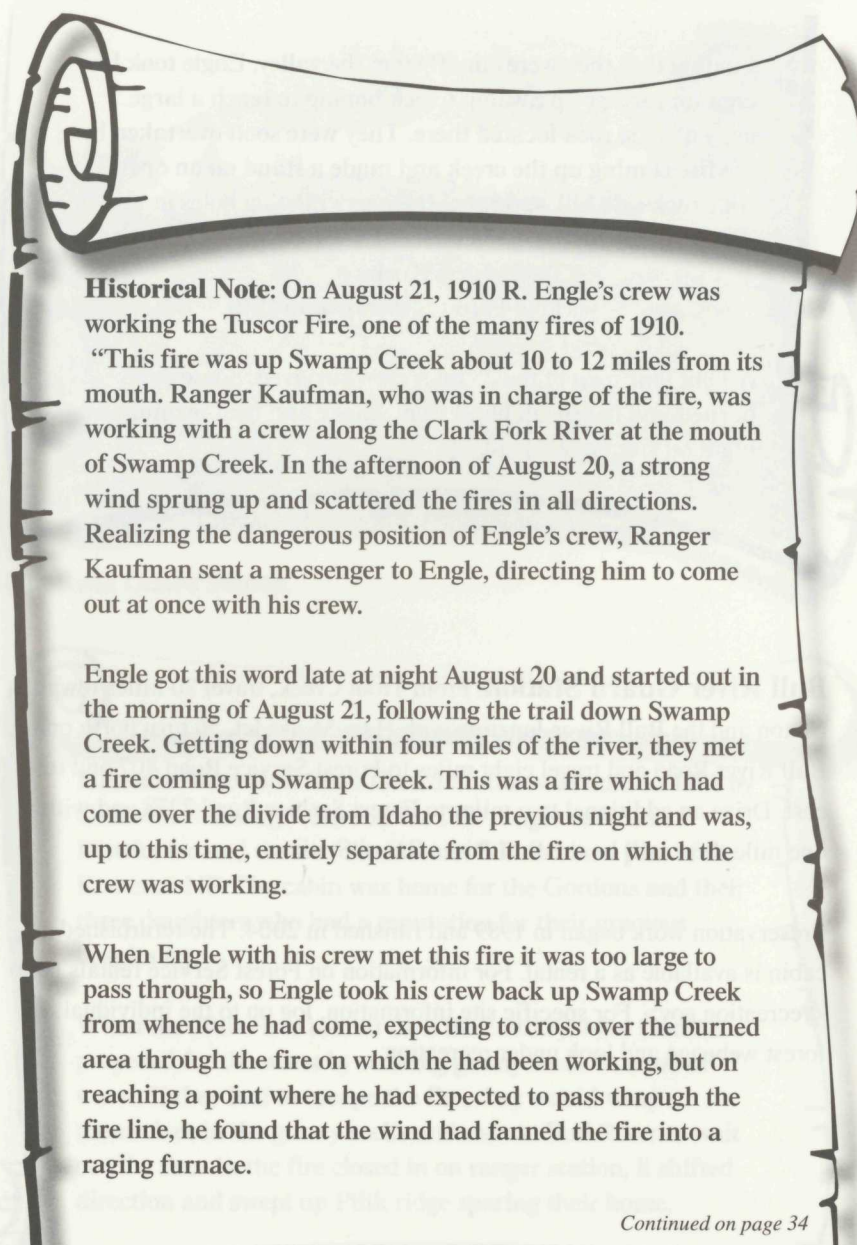
**!!Adventure seeking:** the Cabinet Wilderness: **Strenuous hike!!** Tip: Stop by Cabinet Ranger District for current travel information and a travel map. Cabinet Ranger District: 2693 Hwy 200, Trout Creek, MT 59874, 406-827-3533.

This is a longer hike into the Cabinet Wilderness. Please come prepared for all weather conditions with proper supplies and practice Leave No Trace protocols. Pack It In - Pack It Out (no facilities or garbage containers).

**Swamp Creek Trailhead:** Just past Trout Creek on the right is the Cabinet Ranger Station of the Kootenai NF. About one-quarter of a mile past the Ranger Station is Swamp Creek Loop County Road. On this portion of the trip continue north about two miles and take Fox Road/Forest Service Road 1119 to the Swamp Creek trailhead parking area. Swamp Creek trail #912 takes off from the parking lot, but the actual trailhead markers are a short way up the trail.

Swamp Creek Trail leads to the Cabinet Wilderness. Nine miles up the trail is Buck Lake. From there, the trail switchbacks up the mountain and is called Lost Buck Pass trail and leads to Upper Geiger Lake.

Swamp Creek Trailhead is the general area that R. Engle, a firefighting crew foreman and his crew hiked into the 1910 firestorm on August 20 and 21. An interpretive sign will be erected in the summer of 2010 describing the 1910 Fires and the incident up Swamp Creek that claimed four lives. In fall 2010, a bronze memorial plaque will be placed up the trail in a spot on a slope believed to be where Engle and the crew made their final stand.



**Historical Note:** On August 21, 1910 R. Engle's crew was working the Tuscor Fire, one of the many fires of 1910. "This fire was up Swamp Creek about 10 to 12 miles from its mouth. Ranger Kaufman, who was in charge of the fire, was working with a crew along the Clark Fork River at the mouth of Swamp Creek. In the afternoon of August 20, a strong wind sprung up and scattered the fires in all directions. Realizing the dangerous position of Engle's crew, Ranger Kaufman sent a messenger to Engle, directing him to come out at once with his crew.

Engle got this word late at night August 20 and started out in the morning of August 21, following the trail down Swamp Creek. Getting down within four miles of the river, they met a fire coming up Swamp Creek. This was a fire which had come over the divide from Idaho the previous night and was, up to this time, entirely separate from the fire on which the crew was working.

When Engle with his crew met this fire it was too large to pass through, so Engle took his crew back up Swamp Creek from whence he had come, expecting to cross over the burned area through the fire on which he had been working, but on reaching a point where he had expected to pass through the fire line, he found that the wind had fanned the fire into a raging furnace.

*Continued on page 34*



Finding that they were cut off from the valley, Engle took his crew on further up Swamp Creek hoping to reach a large body of slide rock located there. They were soon overtaken by the fire coming up the creek and made a stand on an open slide rock side hill, several of the party digging holes in the slide rock for further protection.”

1942 - Elers Koch,  
Lolo Forest Supervisor in 1910

All but four men of the 25 man crew survived. Some were burned and nearly all blind from smoke and heat by midnight on August 21, 1910.

**Bull River Guard Station:** From Trout Creek, travel 20 miles towards Noxon and the Bull River Junction with Hwy 56. At Jct. 56 turn north onto Bull River Road and travel eight miles to Forest Service Road 407 and turn east. Drive an additional two miles to Forest Service Road 2278 and within one mile there will be the Bull River Guard Station.

Preservation work began in 1989 and finished in 2004. The refurbished cabin is available as a rental. For information on Forest Service rentals go to <recreation.gov>. For specific site information, log on to the individual forest webpage and look under recreation.



Bull River Guard Station.

**Historic Note:** Bull River Guard Station was built in 1908 by Granville “Granny” Gordon the first ranger of Noxon District located then on the Cabinet NF and now part of the Kootenai NF. The cabin was home for the Gordons and their three daughters who had a reputation for their gracious hospitality.

When the 1910 Fires roared thru the country, Mrs. Gordon prepared for the worst by soaking gunny sacks in a tub of water. If they had to escape the fire, they would wrap themselves in the gunny sacks and race to Bull River to wait out the fire. As the fire closed in on ranger station, it shifted direction and swept up Pilik ridge sparing their home.



## 1910 Fires Commemoration Sites— Montana


**Day Trip #4**—Wallace Idaho to Missoula Montana. From Wallace, Idaho head east on I-90 toward Lookout Pass and the Montana border.

For Further information on sites along the I-90 corridor, please contact Mineral County Museum & Historical Society at 406-822-3543 or [mchs1976@blackfoot.net](mailto:mchs1976@blackfoot.net)

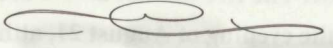
Traveling up over Lookout Pass and entering Montana, pull out at about 1.5 miles down the east side of Lookout Pass. Looking to the south and west, you will see Sohon Pass, the original Montana state entry point in 1859, now called St. Regis Pass. This entire area was engulfed in flames during the firestorm on August 20 and 21 1910. The stumps and burned dead trees are visible on the hillsides.

Continuing down the east side of Lookout Pass, Exit 5 leads to the Taft area. Originally built as a railroad town during the 1907-1910 construction of the Milwaukee Railroad, this town burned at least twice before the fires of 1910. Driving through the area, all around is the second growth timber that grew after the 1910 Fires. Even after 100 years of recovery, effects of the fires are still evident. The only building in town that survived the 1910 Fires was a hotel/bar.

One of the last people to leave Taft was William McKay who stayed to watch for looters but was severely burned in the fires. Reporter W.G. Ferguson from the Missoulian newspaper wrote about McKay's particularly unfortunate story.



**“Two men remained in Taft when the people fled,” Ferguson continued, “They were to watch some property which had been buried. The fire came upon Taft when they were in their shack. Just as they rushed from the door, the rear of the building caught fire. The sheet of flame from the timber enveloped William McKay, who was behind his companion, and burned him from head to foot. His comrade returned, himself uninjured, and dragged McKay to safety. As soon as possible, medical aid was brought from Saltese and McKay’s awful burns were dressed. He was left in charge of a friend who got drunk and dropped a match upon McKay’s bandages which caught fire at once aggravating the previous injuries so that the man died shortly after being brought to Saltese.**



Five miles further east, the town of Saltese retains its historical character. In 1910 Forest Service Ranger Haun called from Saltese and reported the hills were ‘all afire’ and he had kept 200 firefighters there trying to save the town. Because of their efforts, Saltese survived the fire as hot embers fell on the hillsides, amongst the men.



Saltese Train Station.

*[Handwritten signature]*

**“In the meantime, a relief train from Wallace arrived from Saltese and there were several empty boxcars at Saltese, and we gathered up all the women and children and sent them on toward Missoula, keeping all the men that would stay to fight fire in Saltese. The fire did not arrive at Saltese until the evening of August 21, although it had been smoky all day and we had to pack lanterns around there same as night.”**

**Ranger Frank Haun**

*[Handwritten signature]*

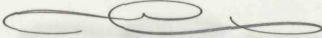
Traveling east on I-90 take Exit 16 to the small town of Haugan which was destroyed in the 1910 Fires. In Haugan, explore the historic Savenac nursery started in 1907 and also burned in 1910. The nursery was replanted in 1911 and went on to fulfill its mission by furnishing millions of seedlings and young trees to replace areas of deforestation. Savenac Visitors Center offers entry to a scenic walk through the memorial trees to a rock monument honoring the firefighters that lost their lives in the 1910 Fires.



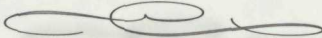
Savenac Nursery Trail.



Continue on the frontage road in Haugan, about 3.1 miles to DeBorgia. Historic sites with markers along the way offer more interesting insights into this area. On this route the rugged terrain is close by. Consider how difficult fighting fires were for the men and equipment of the early century.

  
“There was no reserve of fire equipment at that time. As new crews were put out, new equipment was purchased from hardware stores. Axes, mattocks, shovels, crosscut saws, wash boilers, tubs, coffee pots and frying pans were bought as needed until the supply in most of the local stores was exhausted. The standard bed for a firefighter that year was one shoddy blanket or one cheap sougan.”

1942 - Elers Koch,  
Lolo Forest Supervisor in 1910

  
Continuing in to DeBorgia, the DeBorgia Cemetery is located on the east side of the road. During the 1910 Fires, most of the grave's wooden markers were burned. In DeBorgia itself, three buildings survived the fires: the DeBorgia Hotel, the school and Louie Gagnier's Saloon.

From here either follow the road to its end to view Cantonment Jordan or return to I-90.

Before



After



Before and after pictures of the town of DeBorgia, MT.

At road's end turn around and return to Exit 18. When turning, look north to view Cantonment Jordan built by explorer John Mullan for his men during the difficult winter of 1859 – 1860. Captain Mullen's diaries describe the area as "a dense bed of timber that furnished both building material and fuel, had many fine springs and was securely sheltered by the winds by friendly rims of mountains."

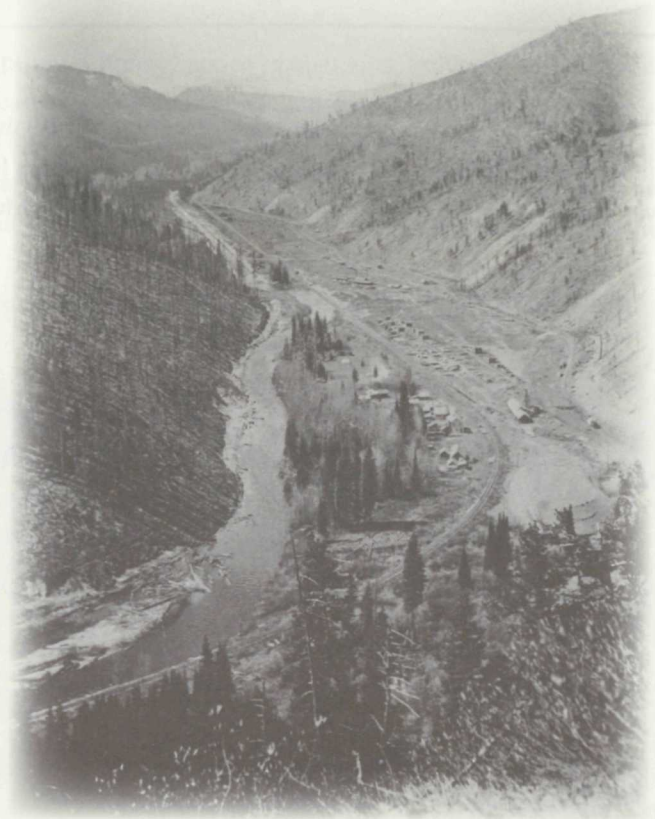
The next stop on the I-90 corridor is Exit 22 to the town of Henderson also destroyed by the 1910 Fires. The next 11 miles is known as Old Highway 10 or Camel's Hump Road leading to St. Regis and tracing the original Mullan Road.



Henderson.

**Tip:** St. Regis is also accessible off I-90 at Exit 33. This route was bypassed in 1976 by I-90.

Along the Camel's Hump Road route notice the old growth timber. On this road between Henderson and St. Regis the whole canyon was on fire in 1910 and trains loaded with people escaping the fires had to make it through this tunnel of flame.



Camel's Hump Road route.



At the western end of Camel's Hump road and the far end of St. Regis canyon the impacts of the 1910 Fires are no longer visible from this route.

**Historical Note:** After the fire the Mann Lumber Company did most of the timber salvage. According to estimates the amount of timber lost would have been used to construct about 55,000 four-room houses.

At Exit 33 the town of St. Regis comes into view. The fires of 1910 did not make it to St. Regis. The town was a staging area for the evacuation for people who could make it to the depot. Trains from as far away as Mullan,



St. Regis Train Station.

ID came through the canyon loading passengers and baggage for their escape to Missoula.

**Ninemile Ranger District:** Lolo National Forest Clearwater Crossing, Great Burn Proposed Wilderness: Continuing along I-90 towards Missoula, travel to the Fish Creek Exit 66 approximately 37 miles west of Missoula. Follow Fish Creek Road 343 south to West Fork Fish Creek Road 7750. Turn on to Road 7750 and follow it to Clearwater Crossing located one mile past Hole in the Wall Lodge.

**Description:** A Forest Service campground, trailhead, administrative site and Clearwater Crossing Guard Station are located here. The fires of 1910 burned much of the area in the drainages above Clearwater Crossing including the North Fork of Fish Creek and Straight Creek. Hikers will see the results of 100 years of regrowth since the 1910 Fires and a few remnant burned trees. The 1910 blaze did not burn through the wet lower reaches of the West Fork drainage. Hikers on this trail will see old growth cedars that survived the fires of 1910. Burned areas along the main Fish Creek drainage viewed from Forest Service Road 343 were primarily owned by Plum Creek Timber Company and part of the Fish Creek Complex wildfire of 2003. These areas resemble the skeletal landscapes that existed over nearly three million acres after the 1910 Fires.

The Clearwater Crossing Guard Station is used today as a base camp for trail crews to access the backcountry and the Ninemile Wildlands Training Center to teach backcountry packing and stock handling. The main buildings were CCC cabins in the 1940's and were moved to the site from Quartz Flats.





Clearwater Crossing station.

**!!Adventure seeking:** major hiking trails begin at Clearwater Crossing including the North Fork, Straight Creek and West Fork trails. This area is considered the gateway into the Great Burn Proposed Wilderness. Remember to assess your physical condition, take plenty of water and Pack It In – Pack It Out (no facilities or garbage receptacles).

**Historic Ninemile Remount Depot:** Continue this trip by returning to I-90 and traveling to Exit 82 approximately 23 miles northwest of Missoula. Drive northwest on Old Highway 10 for 1.4 miles. Turn north on to Remount Road and proceed 2.7 miles to the Ninemile Ranger Station.



Ninemile Remount Depot Visitor's Center.

**Historical Note:** The Ninemile Remount Depot was established in the early days of firefighting as a response to severe fires in the west. From 1930 until 1953, the Ninemile Remount Depot provided well-equipped pack and riding stock, experienced packers and transportation for firefighting efforts in the rugged mountains of the Northern Rockies. The site is listed on the National Register of Historic Places for its unique role as a Forest Service Remount Depot and for its distinct Cape Cod style architecture. Most of the original buildings, corrals and stock facilities are used today and are visible on the walking tour of the Remount Depot.

The Remount Depot is home to the Ninemile Ranger Station, the Ninemile Wildlands Training Center and Northern Region Pack Train which provides pack support for back-country projects throughout Montana and Idaho.



The self-guided walking tour brochure of the Remount Depot is available at the Visitor Center and at the Ranger Station front desk. The walking tour explores the working features of the Remount Depot and the history of the area. The walking tour takes 30-45 minutes.



Ninemile Remount Station employees.

### Final Note

The 1910 Fires started as hundreds of small fires that were reportedly whipped into one giant conflagration by severe winds gusting to 70 mph to create the Big Burn. Today, Ranger Ed Pulaski's tool is still used to build fireline and many areas are only slowly recovering from the intensity of fires. Today we know that the forests in north Idaho and western Montana need fire to work as part of the natural cycle of ecology in these forests. The Forest Service, the Idaho Department of Lands, the Montana Division of Natural Resources and Conservation and the Bureau of Land Management work to help nature's balance by using fire to reduce fuels and keep devastating fires from completely destroying landscapes.

Fire prevention, Firewise for homeowners in the wildland-urban interface and an increased understanding of fire behavior help land managers, property owners and firefighters stay safe and restore functioning landscapes.

Thank you for commemorating the deep history, great loss, and lessons learned in the fires of 1910.

Please:

***Honor Wilderness protocols.***

***Prevent wildfires.***

***Help others to learn to live with fire.***

***Recycle this guide.***

**Notes:**

