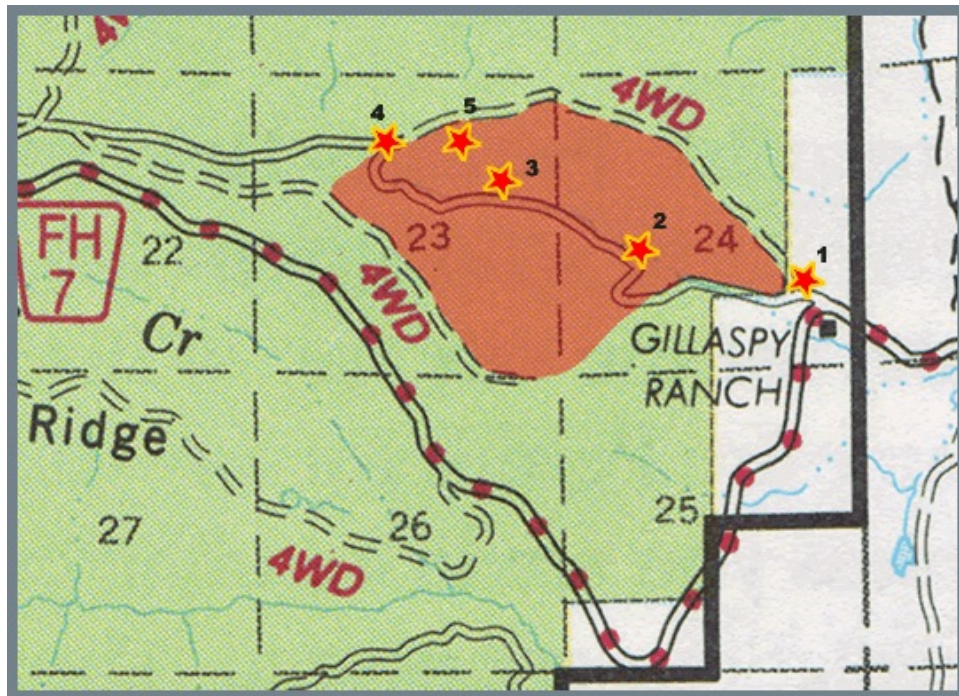


## Staff Ride to the Rattlesnake Fire



On July 9, 1953 a New Tribes Mission firefighting crew under the direction of U.S. Forest Service overhead was trapped by flames as they worked on a brush covered hillside in Powderhouse Canyon on the Mendocino National Forest.

The crew was working on a spot fire in a narrow canyon covered with 40 year-old Chaparral brush. They had just completed construction of a hand line around their spot fire when a sudden wind shift caused another spot fire to flare-up. This other spot fire was located up-canyon from the crew. However, the unusually strong down-canyon wind pushed the uncontrolled spot fire toward the crew's location. Within 30 minutes the fire had run more than a mile down canyon, catching the crew while they attempted to fight their way through the heavy brush to safety. Fifteen firefighters perished on the Rattlesnake Fire that day. Nine fellow crewmembers barely escaped.

Much of the knowledge gained about wildland fire has come through the high cost of firefighter lives. Lessons learned from the Rattlesnake Fire played a large role in the decision to form the first national level task force to examine wildland firefighter safety in 1957.

This Rattlesnake Staff Ride resource is a product of the NWCG Leadership Committee. Project team members were:

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- Jim Cook - U.S. Forest Service - National Interagency Fire Center
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1987 interview with crew boss Paul Turner was conducted by John W. Allendorf, U.S. Forest Service, Northern Rockies Regional Office.

Special thanks to the Willows Journal for retyping of historical newspaper articles.