

## Stand 5 - Missionary Spot Fire

This is identified in the investigation report Figure 1 as Point 10 and in Figure 2 as Point 4. The Missionary Spot Fire was originally detected at about 20:15 by Forest Supervisor Thomas from Powder House Turn. The spot is believed to have originated sometime around 20:05 when “a local wind of considerable turbulence developed for a brief period.” Other spots were detected and extinguished just below Alder Springs Road and near the old car around this time.

Thomas, accompanied by dozer operator C.W. Randrup and a reporter Charles Gleeson, made a reconnaissance of the spot fire and it was determined by Thomas that it would probably burn to the top of Powder House Ridge and that they would attack it after it made its run. Shortly after 20:35, when that decision was made, the upslope flow of air subsided. It was then apparent that the spot fire would not run to the top of Powder House Ridge.

At about 21:00 Missionary Straw Boss Dave Johnson and three New Tribes Mission crewmembers were assigned by Lafferty to make initial attack on the spot fire. They were instructed to “not take chances and to start work at the head of the fire.” This group walked directly from Powder House Turn, contour, to the fire, which is represented by Line 1 in Figure 2. At approximately 21:15 Crew Boss Stanley Vote led fourteen more New Tribes Mission crewmembers, including three more Straw Bosses, from Powder House Turn to join Johnson’s group. Vote took his crew part way up the cat trail that had been constructed up Powder House Ridge and then down to the spot, which is represented Line 2 in Figure 2. Lunches arrived at Powder House Turn shortly after Votes departure and at about 21:45 Assistant Ranger Robert Powers and four additional New Tribes Mission crewmembers left Powder House Turn to take lunches to the people working on the spot fire. This group proceeded along Powder House Ridge to a point beyond the spot fire, down a ridge, and then back to the spot fire represented by Line 3 in Figure 2.

Upon arriving at the spot fire the last group placed the lunches in the draw at the northeast corner of the spot fire. They were then told by Vote that the line construction was finished. It was there, in the draw that the lunches were counted and distributed. While that was taking place Vote and Powers discussed the fact that the main fire at the head of Powder

House Canyon was flaring up and they walked a short distance up the ridge that the Missionary Spot Fire was on to observe the main fire. After returning to the draw Vote and Powers discussed whether the Missionary Spot would provide protection (safety zone). They decided to eat the lunches there, at the spot fire. They were all located in or near the draw on the east side of the spot fire. They had sat down for only a very few minutes when warning came from Lafferty to get out, and hurry.

[Click to read articles from the Willows Journal in 1953.](#)

[Click to see the New Tribes Mission notification of the tragedy.](#)

[Click to see the 1957 Fire Task Force Report.](#)



Figure 1: Looking at Stand 5 from across the canyon you can see the location of the spot fire, and distances traveled by the survivors, and those who where caught by the fire at the cross.



Figure 2: From Stand 5 you can see where Vote and Powers walked to the ridge on the western flank of the spot fire and observed increased fire behavior at the head of Powder House Canyon before returning to the lunch spot to eat.