



Bell's Crew – Middle Fork Big Creek

“Mr. John W. Bell is a man of about 35 years of age, thoroughly acquainted with mountain conditions, having spent a large part of his life in this western country. He is a conservative and thoughtful and an all-around man of the mountains. He had his crew, consisting of about 50 men, working in conjunction with Pulaski's crew at the head of the middle fork of Big Creek. When the terrific windstorm arose and fires were started in new places, he sought safety on a small clearing on the homestead claim of Joseph Beauchamp. Under ordinary conditions this place, consisting of a clearing of about two acres, would have been sufficient to offer protection. A small stream flowed through the opening and some of the men protected themselves by lying down in the stream, while seven sought shelter in a small cave that had been dug for the purpose of storing the belongings of Mr. Beauchamp. The terrific storm that preceded the fire by about a minute, which was of course intensified practically every tree of a dense forest in this region. The seven men who sought shelter in the cave were burned beyond recognition three others who were in the stream were killed by falling trees. This constituted the number of dead of this crew, but the remainder who sought shelter in the creek had their hair burned off the back part of their heads and the skin all burned from their necks, besides being nearly suffocated from the smoke. One of these injured men made his way into Wallace, a distance of twelve miles, by nine o'clock Sunday morning, the day after they were injured. Judging from the distress of the men in Pulaski's crew, I had already put a crew of 17 men to work cutting out a trail leading to this point, and upon learning the condition of the men, I immediately sent out two doctors on foot, with a crew of men with medicine, blankets and provision, to help the injured men. It required a crew of 17 working all day Sunday, Sunday night, Monday and Monday night to open the trail to the injured men 12 miles from Wallace. This enabled me to get pack horses in to the injured men and they were brought to Wallace. With the exception of two men who had friends at this place, the dead men were buried near the spot where they died, a few days later. Reverend Carter, a Congregational minister at Wallace, volunteered to go along with the burial crew to give Christian burial to the dead. All of this crew, with the exception of the ten men who were killed, speedily recovered from their injuries at the hospital at Wallace. The Beauchamp cabin was located in the Middle Fork of Big Creek in Section 27, Township 47 North, Range 3 East.”

Excerpt from the collection of “When The Mountains Roared”, (page 16-17) USDA Forest Service