

few successful novels written about wildland firefighting. Part of Matthews's success in capturing these compelling scenes is certainly due to his own experience as a firefighter. He's been there, done that, and now uses his experiences to give realism to a fire scene that grew cold nearly 60 years ago.

Thirtymile Revealed

A more recent tragedy in northern Washington state is the subject of John Maclean's latest book, "The Thirtymile Fire: A Chronicle of Bravery and Betrayal." As in his earlier work, "Fire on the Mountain," a chilling account of 1994's South Canyon Fire, Maclean recaptures the Thirtymile Fire from beginning to end, then continues with the investigation and its aftermath.

There is no fiction here. Maclean is a highly skilled journalist and a fine writer (the son of Norman Maclean and a long-time

Chicago Tribune reporter), and this book is the product of his interviews, personal visits to the scene and countless hours spent absorbing the investigators' reports. His ability to mold fragments from the incident—thoughts, actions, variables and decisions—into a fluid account is riveting... and often disturbing.

One compelling part of this story is that it involves several first-time firefighters who rely on the more-seasoned firefighters to teach them how to fight fire and keep them safe. There's little else in the working world to compare with firefighting, and sometimes a rookie isn't sure when the usual has become unusual, such as when Rebecca Welch finds herself at the beginning of a fire entrapment that would soon take the lives of four of her colleagues.

Incident Commander Ellreese Daniels and Squad Boss Thom Taylor had just decided it was time to abandon the fire. They loaded

everyone they could fit into their van, but four members of the crew couldn't fit and had to trot along behind it as the van made a dash for safety—through the flames.

"Dead ahead, flames formed an archway over the road; in seconds the one avenue of escape would be cut off. Daniels and Taylor locked eyes. They had time, barely, to gun the engine and pass under the flaming arch. But the four people on foot would never make it. Without a word, Daniels spun the wheel and ran the vehicle to the side of the road, jammed the transmission into reverse, and made a 180-degree turn. When the firefighters on foot saw the van's brake lights flash red, an unbelieving Welch turned to [Tom] Craven.

"Is it like this every day?" she asked."

Thirtymile began as an everyday fire, one of two wildfires that erupted in early July 2001 on the Okanogan National Forest. The largest at the time was the Libby South Fire, and a

FireFit Footnotes

Core stability: Build a better foundation for fitness

By Bequi Livingston

As we continue to stress the importance of maintaining a balanced fitness regime year-round, it's important to understand the critical role core stability plays in our overall fitness and well-being. Core Stability Training (CST) is essential for both job performance and injury prevention. The body's core muscles—also known as the "girdle"—form the foundation for movement because these muscles help to stabilize the spine.

The core muscles lie deep within the torso, generally attach to the spine and involve the pelvic muscles for stabilization. When you contract these muscles, you stabilize your spine and pelvis, creating a solid base of support. Once you have this strong foundation, it's easier to perform powerful movements with your arms and legs. Another benefit: Strong core muscles help to correct the postural imbalances that can lead to injury. Developing functional core fitness helps maintain daily living and sustain physical activities.

What's interesting about CST is that it involves a coordinated movement of many different muscles. Most weightlifting and other exercises focus on working specific muscles rather than the entire torso at once. Additionally, CST exercises can be performed in the field or in the comfort of the home, either using a variety of exercise tools (stability ball, balance board) or just your body weight (push ups, reverse crunches, planks, etc.).

One great CST foundational exercise that can be used on a daily basis is abdominal bracing. Here's how to do it:



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CST exercises can be performed in the field or in the comfort of the home, either using a variety of exercise tools or just your body weight, like the plank exercise shown here.

- Lay flat on the ground with your knees bent and feet flat on the floor;
- Slowly push your belly button toward your spine, forcing your lower back into the floor;
- Hold it and relax;
- Repeat 5–10 times, counting out loud so you don't hold your breath.

Bequi Livingston is the regional fire operations health and safety specialist for the U.S. Forest Service, Southwestern Regional Office. Livingston is a certified Personal Fitness Trainer, Fitness Specialist and Fitness Instructor. She is currently completing her college education with a major in exercise science and minor in athletic training. She owns a fitness consulting business, "BodySense," and developed Fireline Fitness in 1984 in order to provide a balanced fitness program for wildland firefighters. Livingston, along with a team of other interagency fire experts, recently developed the national FireFit program endorsed by the Federal Fire and Aviation Safety Team.