

GUIDED TOUR NARRATIVE – DROP HEAVY EQUIPMENT POINT

Leading the men scrambling up and across the north slope of Mann Gulch, Foreman Dodge kept looking over his shoulder at the fire that was steadily gaining on his crew. He calculated that at the rate they were moving and the fire was advancing, they were not going to out-run the blaze or reach a point of safety. At 5:53 PM, breathing heavily, Dodge paused on the steep hillside long enough to turn to the crew and shout, “Drop your heavy equipment!” This order was relayed to the men several times by Bill Hellman.

Immediately, the men began to shed the equipment they were carrying. They dropped the two cross-cut saws, the 5-gallon water cans, and their extra tools. But, to some of the men the order wasn't clear; what did the foreman mean by “heavy equipment”? Confused, recreation guard Jim Harrison threw away his shovel and pulaski, but kept his heavy fire pack still strapped to his back. Others threw down everything but one or two handtools. But apparently most of the men (with the exception of Wag Dodge who retained his shovel) shed anything and everything that they thought might slow them down in their personal race with the advancing flames. Later, suggesting the crew was fairly well grouped together at this point, all the cast off equipment would be found in a rough circle about 100 feet in diameter. The fire, however, had gained on the crew during this momentary pause and was now to within 75 to 100 yards of the men.