

GUIDED TOUR NARRATIVE – THE TURN AROUND POINT

Following Dodge's instructions, Bill Hellman led the remaining thirteen smokejumpers directly down slope until they reached the drainage bottom. As soon as they crossed over to the north side of the gulch, Hellman turned to the left or west and began leading the crew toward the Missouri River. This course would take them on contour across the slope so that with every step the crew drew further up from the draw bottom.

With Hellman in the lead, the smokejumpers broke into two groups separated by about 500 feet. One member of the crew, David Navon, found the fire sufficiently interesting to pull a camera out of his pack and take a few snapshots of the growing smoke column and fire.

Meanwhile, Dodge, with Harrison in tow, returned to the lunch spot. But not stopping to eat, they gathered some rations and water and headed down the gulch to catch up with the crew headed for the Missouri.

After hiking for several minutes, Dodge and Harrison caught up with the lagging group of smokejumpers at about 5:40 PM. Foreman Dodge signaled for the leading group to stop, rejoined the two groups, placed himself in the lead, and continued walking the men toward the safety of the river.

The men continued hiking toward the river for about another five minutes and covered about 400 yards. With Dodge well in the lead, he was the first to crest a small finger ridge that up to this point had blocked his and the crew's view of the lower end of Mann Gulch. As soon as he reached the crest of the ridge Wag Dodge saw that the fire had somehow spotted off the ridge to his left and was now burning directly up slope at himself and his crew.

At about 5:45 PM, without a word of explanation to his men, foreman Dodge halted the crew. With their escape route to the river now cut off, Dodge reversed the crew's direction and began to lead them directly away from the advancing fire. This course would take them back up the north side of Mann Gulch on an angle toward the ridgetop separating Mann Gulch from what would later become known as Rescue Gulch. The fire was 150 to 200 yards below the crew at this point.

At least initially, the crew was confused about the change in direction, but the reason soon became apparent as the fire and smoke topped the finger ridge behind them. Their pace across and up the canyon increased.

With Dodge in the lead, the men hurried across and up the slope for another eight minutes. Although they covered another 450 yards, the going was difficult. The slope and numerous rocks hidden in the deep, well-cured grass they were trying to traverse slowed their progress. The fire, however, was starting to accelerate as it moved out from under the tree canopy and was more exposed to the winds; it gathered speed and began to close in on the crew.