

# Missoula Smokejumpers Place Granite Columns Where Firefighters Fell

from articles in *GREAT FALLS (MT) TRIBUNE* 5/21/907  
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On August 5, 1949, 13 firefighters lost their lives on the Mann Gulch fire, in the Helena National Forest, near the Gates of the Mountains Wilderness, on the Missouri River, about 20 miles north of Helena, MT. Twelve of the firefighters were smokejumpers.

Forty-eight years later, on a Tuesday, May 20, 1997, six Missoula-based smokejumpers parachuted down into the grassy gulch. They came to install granite columns where each of the 13 firefighters fell in 1949.

White, concrete crosses, each with the name of one of the firefighters, were placed on the steep slopes in 1950. But time is taking its toll. The cast-and-rebar crosses are weathering and crumbling.

Wayne Williams, smokejumper squad leader at the Missoula Aerial Fire Depot, spearheaded plans to replace the crumbling markers. Contributions came

from the Forest Service, Smokejumper Welfare Fund, Intermountain Fire Sciences Laboratory in Missoula, and relatives of two of the firefighters killed in the Mann Gulch fire.

John Maclean and Jean Maclean Snyder, children of Dr. Norman Maclean, author of the book about Mann Gulch, "Young Men and Fire" (published in 1992), made contributions from the book royalties.

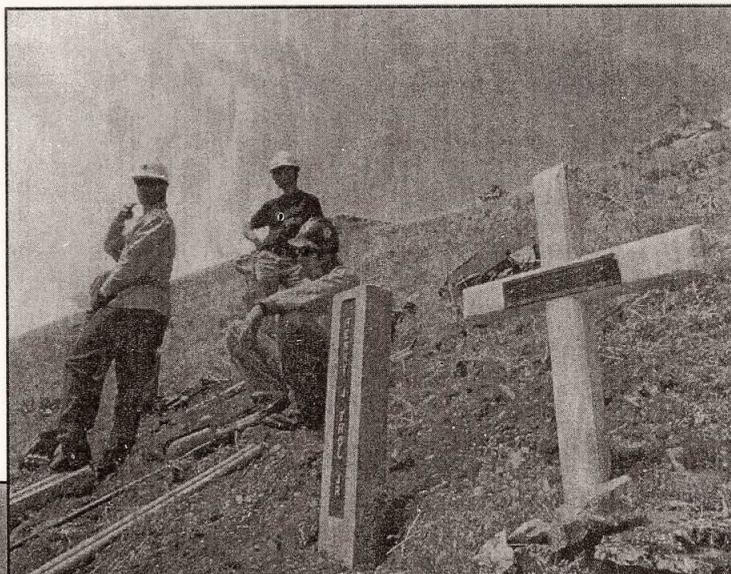
Ted Stetler, Western Monument Service, Missoula, designed the 36-inch autumn rose granite columns. Stetler and his staff made the monuments. Names of each of the firefighter is set in relief in the granite columns.



*SMOKEJUMPER SCOTT BELKNAP digs a hole for a new granite monument. Fellow smokejumper Hardy Bloemeke looks on. Both smokejumpers are based at the Missoula Aerial Fire Depot.*

The remaining crosses will be left to weather away. "These new markers do change the mosaic on the slopes," explained Laird Robinson, an ex-smokejumper who is now on the RO Public & Governmental Relations staff in the Northern Region headquarters. "The important thing is that they're not forgotten."

At a later date a 14th granite column will be placed as a memorial to Harry Gisborn, fire scientist, Intermountain Station, who died of a heart attack, Nov. 9, 1949, while investigating the Mann Gulch fire. It will be placed lower down the gulch, near the Missouri River.



*ONE OF THE NEW GRANITE MEMORIAL COLUMNS. The white, concrete crosses were placed on the slopes of Mann Gulch in 1950.*

GREAT FALLS (MT) TRIBUNE photos by James E. Larcombe.

Former smokejumper Tim Eldridge hiked to Mann Gulch to work with others in selecting a landing spot for the six jumpers who came from Missoula to place the granite columns.

Six horsemen from the Last Chance Chapter (Helena, MT) of Backcountry Horsemen used fourteen of their horses to pack in the 100-pound granite columns, cement, shovels and other work tools. The Forest Service plane made a number of passes over the gulch to parachute in supplies and hundreds of gallons of water.

Jim Beck, in his 23rd year as a Forest Service smokejumper, said he came to Mann Gulch with the other smokejumpers to help place the granite memorial columns "To make sure what happened here isn't forgotten."

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