

Incident Summary Page for the 100 Fires Project

Incident Name: Banner Grade Fire	Incident Date & Time: 05/14/1934 @ 13:30
Incident Location: Julian, California about 60 miles northeast of San Diego	Incident Size: 1200+ acres
Types of resources involved: State Emergency Relief Administration (SERA) crewmembers	# of Fatalities/injuries: 3 firefighters perished; 2 miners suffered burn injuries
Reason this fire was selected for the 100 Fires list: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ 3 or more firefighter fatalities by entrapment This fire is <u>not</u> documented in the NWCG <i>Historical Wildland Firefighter Fatalities</i> publication (NFES 1849/PMS 822)	
Conditions leading up to the event:	
<p>The fire originated in Banner Canyon on June 14 and quickly threatened the rural communities of Banner to the east in the bottom of Banner Canyon and Julian to the west at the top of Banner Canyon. There was a SERA work camp on the Clark Ranch in the Julian area and a crew was housed at the camp. The crew did conservation work and assisted with firefighting when needed. State and federal resources, along with volunteer fire departments, and the Clark Ranch SERA Crew which was comprised of 22 men, responded to the fire.</p> <p>Fuels were brush and chaparral at the canyon bottom, transitioning to pines at the upper elevations. Riparian zones were mostly scrub oak. In the Julian area there was a mix of live oak and pines.</p>	
Brief description of the event:	
<p>The Clark Ranch SERA Crew was constructing line in the Helvitia Gulch area when the wind shifted and threatened the crew. The crew ran out to the Banner Grade Road and split up with some heading east and some heading west along the road. Unbeknownst to the supervisor, three of the crewmembers headed up an old mining trail in Helvitia Gulch. When the supervisor got the crew together back at their Clark Ranch camp, he thought the three missing men had decided to stay at the temporary fire camp. The next morning, June 15, when they couldn't be found at the fire camp, a search was started and their scorched bodies were found in Helvitia Gulch. Clarence Harris, John Leapley, and Ambrose Williams were the first recorded wildland firefighter fatalities in San Diego County.</p> <p>Two miners were also rescued around their mines. They were trapped by the fire and were found alive but had suffered burn injuries and were brought out of the fire area to get medical attention. The fire, which was later determined to be arson caused, nearly destroyed the Kentwood in the Pines resort along with four homes and 14 cabins.</p>	
Fire behavior factors that were present during the event:	
The fire responded to an unexpected wind shift.	
Operational lessons available for learning from this incident:	
Keep informed on current and expected weather conditions. Have an emergency escape plan and make it known to all. Maintain control of your crew at all times; crews should move with experienced personnel in both the front, to lead the crew to safety, and back, to account for personnel and provided clear direction anytime the crew changes locations.	
Notable impact or historical significance for the wildland fire service from this incident:	
The Banner Grade Fire was not historically significant nor did it have a notable impact on the wildland fire service. However, it is one of the many multi-fatality fires during this Historical Era that have been forgotten to history. If this fire had occurred today, it would have been considered a major tragedy prompting an extensive investigation process and most likely a number of directed safety action items.	
Links to more information on this incident:	
https://wlfalwaysremember.net/1934/05/14/clarence-harris-john-leapley-ambrose-williams/ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/California_State_Relief_Administration https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Federal_Emergency_Relief_Administration	
Newspaper articles: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Escondido Times-Advocate ~ May 16, 1934 (Front page) ➤ Los Angeles Times ~ May 17, 1934 (Part II) ➤ Adair County Herald (Missouri) ~ May 31, 1934 (Funeral remembrance for John Leapley) ➤ Pomona Progress Bulletin ~ June 15, 1934 (Front page) 	

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The Wildland Fire Lessons Learned Center offers an excellent site which provides information on many wildland incidents:
[Wildland Fire Lessons Learned Center's Incident Review Database \(IRDB\) \(wildfire.gov\)](https://www.wildfire.gov/wildland-fire-lessons-learned-center/incident-review-database)

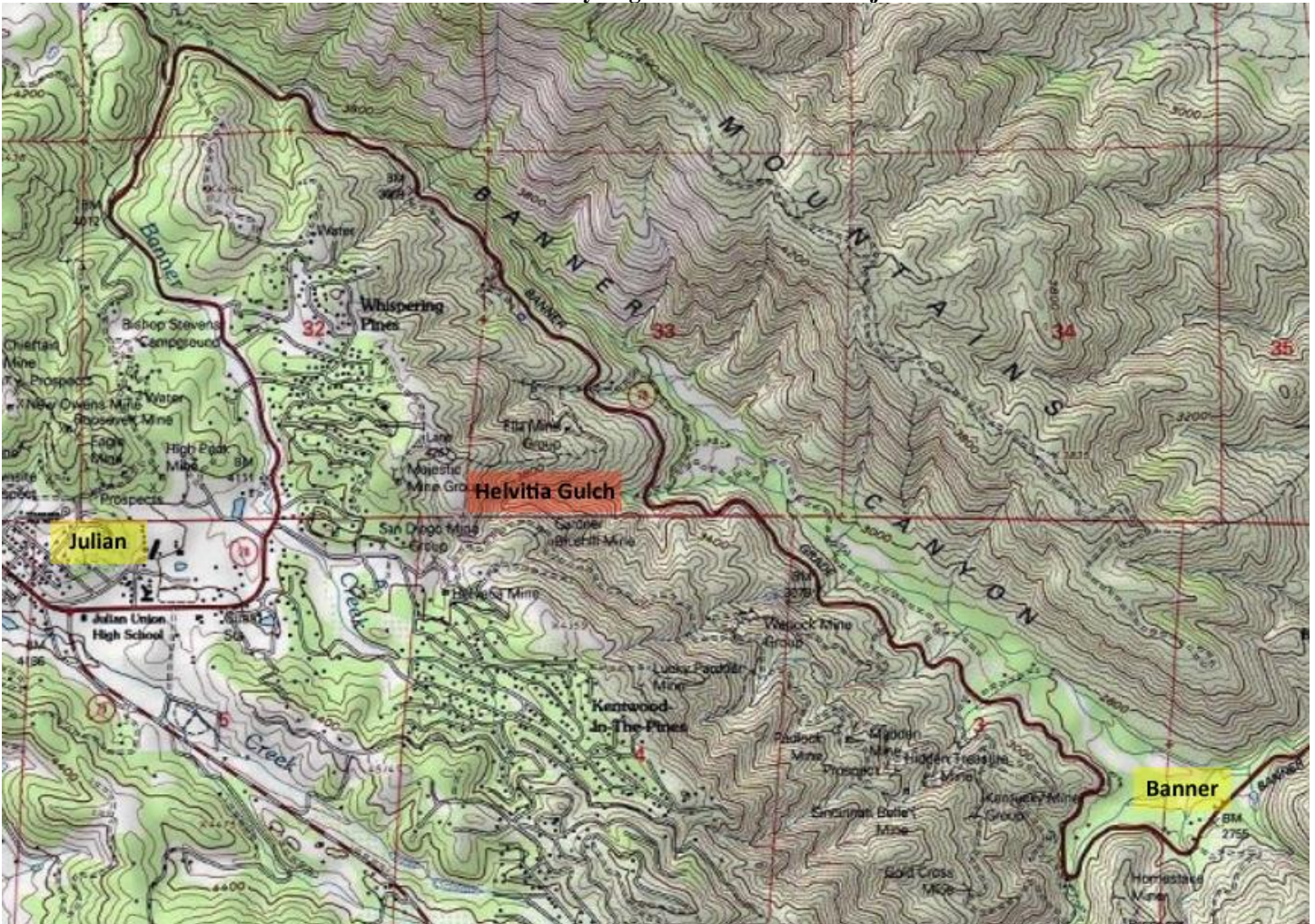
This summary page was proudly provided by:
Dennis W. Baldrige, former Superintendent Laguna Hotshots

March 2024



Banner Grade Fire inscription at the California Wildland Firefighter Memorial
This memorial is located at the summit of State Route 74 in Orange County, California

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Banner Grade Fire Vicinity Map

Yellow highlights mark the towns of Julian and Banner and the orange highlight marks the location of Helvitia Gulch
No records of the actual fire perimeter were found