



Gunflint Burning: Fire in the Boundary Waters

Cary J. Griffith

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May 5, 2007, was a day like any other in Steve Posniak's beloved Boundary Waters, except for one thing: the weather.

Low humidity, higher-than-normal daytime temperatures, and robust winds made the area ripe for wildfires. Not the most careful of campers, Posniak, whose custom it was to burn all his paper trash before leaving his campsite, ignored the warnings he'd received, lit his fire, and went into his tent to pack up his things. By the time he came out, embers carried by the wind had spread the fire beyond his ability to contain it, and the Ham Lake Fire, one of the largest and most destructive fires in Minnesota history, began its onslaught. It was to burn an estimated 75,551 acres before it was finally subdued.

Cary J. Griffith has given a cinema-worthy blow-by-blow account of the people, places, and events associated with the massive wildfire as area residents, resort owners, and volunteer and professional firefighters choreographed their efforts to fight the inferno.

Despite evacuation orders, not everyone was willing to leave their homes and businesses, choosing instead to work together with friends, neighbors, and firefighters to salvage what they could. Manning his hoses and sprinklers, seventy-six-year-old Bob Monehan reported that "the whole world was on fire, covered in smoke and flame." The roar of the inferno was so loud that it would have been impossible to hear a person standing right next to him screaming. Fortunately, his home was spared.

A tribute to all those who work to protect and preserve our forests, property, and lives by putting their own lives on the line, the book is also a stark reminder that a moment of carelessness can result in epic devastation.

KRISTINE MORRIS (May/June 2018)

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