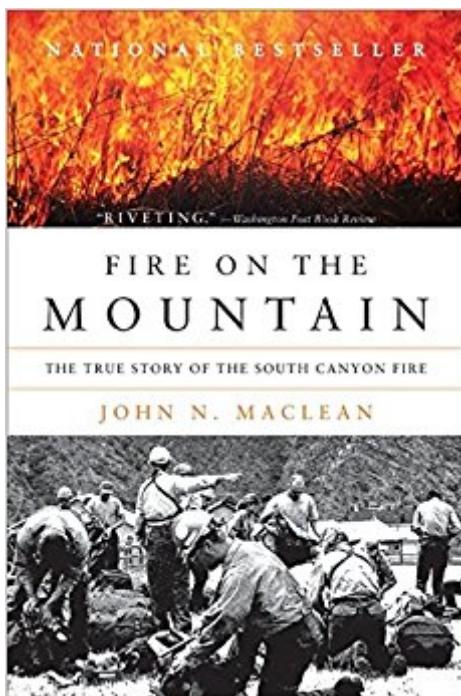


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# Fire On The Mountain: The True Story Of The South Canyon Fire



## Synopsis

In 1994, a wildfire on Colorado's Storm King Mountain was wrongly identified at the outset as occurring in South Canyon. This unintentional, seemingly minor human error was merely the first in a string of mistakes that would be compounded into one of the greatest tragedies in the annals of firefighting. Before it was done, fourteen courageous firefighters—men and women, hotshots, smokejumpers, and helicopter crew—“would lose their lives battling the deadly, so-called South Canyon blaze. John N. Maclean’s award-winning national bestseller *Fire on the Mountain* is a stunning reconstruction of the killer conflagration and its aftermath.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Colorado and its neighboring states battle thousands of wildfires every year, scrub and sagebrush blazes often ignited by lightning strikes in the dry, hot days of summer. A vast, intertwined firefighting infrastructure combining local resources with agencies like the Forest Service and the BLM, reacts to these flare-ups as if going to war--and in theory, the coordination and communication ensures that fires are fought in the most efficient and safe manner possible. But while most wildfires in Colorado end up costing just over \$60,000 on average with no loss of life, the catastrophic South Canyon fire of 1994 burned for 10 days, at the ultimate cost of \$4.5 million and the lives of 14 firefighters. OSHA would later describe the coordinated action flatly as a "management failure," and concurrent investigations would reveal a tangled web of jealous rivalries, bureaucratic bungling, and severe morale problems. (One of the early on-scene supervisors would later tell investigators, "Leadership in this state sucks.") John Maclean (son of Norman Maclean, who wrote both *A River*

Runs Through It and an award-winning account of Montana's deadly 1949 Mann Gulch fire) skillfully unfolds that summer's foreboding blow-by-blow. Fire on the Mountain weaves together a tense narrative of almost cinematic action, starring ballsy cowboy smokejumpers, frustrated federal middle managers, seasoned "hotshots" flown in like commandos, pissed-off tanker pilots, and well-intentioned but spin-wary politicians. Maclean's well-sketched personalities bring the action on the ground convincingly to life--and knowing up front that many of his main characters won't survive South Canyon makes this tragic tale that much more compelling. --Paul Hughes --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

With a reporter's objectivity and brisk prose, Maclean describes a series of small blunders in fire management that led to tragedy in July 1994 in western Colorado when a thunderstorm on Storm King Mountain, mislabeled by a dispatcher as South Canyon, killed 14 firefighters. As rain evaporated in the severe heat and drought, lightning ignited the high desert forest of scrub oak, piñon pine and juniper. Maclean's evenhandedness works against him: the reader longs for more outrage at the series of blunders and misfortunes that first led to a delay in responding to the fire and, later, to fatalities among those who battled the blaze. Maclean does bring the terrain and the fire to life with clarity and economy, and he paints a vivid portrait of the rugged firefighters who supply the most thrilling and saddest moments, men and women who displayed remarkable bravery and sheer physical effort. Among the 49 firefighters assembled on Storm King Mountain by the National Interagency Fire Center were "smoke jumpers," who parachute onto fires; "helitacks," who attack fire from helicopters; and "hot shots," mostly younger ground teams with a mix of skills and experience. Nine of the deaths were hotshots from Prineville, Ore. Maclean handles their deaths respectfully and manages to communicate the lessons to be drawn about fire management in the course of a suspenseful narrative filled with admirable, everyday heroes. 7-city author tour. (Oct.) FYI: The author's father, Norman Maclean, wrote the classic *Young Men and Fire* about the 1949 smoke jumper disaster in Mann Gulch, Mont.. Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

A gripping true account of a most heartbreaking effort by a group of "hotshots" (wildland firefighters) from Oregon to fight a fire on Storm King Mountain that initially had been erroneously called in as being on South Canyon, near Glenwood, Colorado. We were so moved by it that on our next trip out to the area, we found and hiked the trail to a small memorial that gives added context to the story.

I've studied the South Canyon fire on and off ever since I helped build the memorial trail on Storm King Mountain way back in 1995. Just a young 19-year-old then, my only remaining memories are of carrying landscaping material, briefly sitting beside a father as he dug the hole for his son's/daughter's cross, and choking up with exhaustion and tears as I tried to climb the last 150 yards to Zero Point. The book helped me to have a much broader understanding of the incident after all these years. This book fills in a lot of the back stories and firefighter biographies that are not present in the two South Canyon incident reports. It certainly doesn't answer all the questions about the fire--they likely exist in the ten thousand pages of reference material cited by Maclean at the end of the book--but it's certainly worth reading for anyone looking for more insight into the incident. Written in a nice prose style, Maclean builds suspense throughout the first five chapters, even though I already knew what the final outcome of the fire was. It put an ache in my gut more than once as Maclean described the everyday activities and fateful chance decisions of the firefighters 24 to 48 hours before their deaths. The prose isn't perfect: On more than one occasion, Maclean refers to previous wildland incidents (such as Mann Gulch) in a choppy fashion in an attempt to relate it to South Canyon. The attempt is probably lost on the casual reader. References like that only made sense to me because I've studied the fires (or took the time to look them up while I was reading the book). The obligatory photos in the center of the book are in black and white (hence the -1 star) and aren't very useful when it comes time to understanding movement in the last minutes of the firefighters' lives. To get useful pictures, the reader will need to download one of the official reports, which will have much more detailed reference photographs. The book provides a nice level of detail that allows me to study the leadership decisions and risk management associated with the fire while providing useful insight into the emotional side of the tragedy.

This was great reading. I was somewhat emotional at times. I am a retired U.S. Forest Service employee and firefighter and knew several of the Prineville crew members. John did a great job in investigating what happened and how this tragedy came to happen. Very good book. I also recommend this reading by other firefighters as a heads up as to what can happen in a very short time on wildfires. A few minutes can make a difference between life and death.

This is such a remarkable book. It satisfies on several fronts, creating a visual world that stays with the reader long after the last sentence is finished. Maclean's research was complete and meticulous. He compiles his work into an astounding, captivating narrative that draws the reader along as the tragic events unfold on Storm King. I felt as if I were there on the west flank line with the Prineville

hotshots and the smoke jumpers. As I read this compelling book, I felt as if I'd known each of the victims for many, many years. I could actually feel the superheated air and smell the toxic gases coming off the blowup. Along with a gripping narrative, Maclean incorporates analysis of events and decisions made prior to, during, and after the tragedy. This, again, is based on hours of interviews and meticulous research. His reconstruction of the final moments of each of the victims was very beneficial as well. I've never been to Storm King Mountain, but after reading this truly exceptional book, I plan to go. I didn't know any of the victims or people involved either, but after reading John Maclean's exceptional book I feel as if I were there. Buy this book, read it, cherish it, be moved by it. It is a lasting memorial to those who died on the mountain.

Awesome book. I loved the fathers, Norman's, book on the Mann Gulch Fire and John has written a superior book.

The story is a amazing story. Maclean does a great job of writing out the events in a way that makes them easy to follow. The only reason for 3 stars and not 4 or 5 is that he does cast blame on some of the people that were involved in the tragedy. I know there is a lot of things that go on in the wildfire environment I just wish he would have left out blame and focused on the events of the men and their stories.

Great book gives us a better understanding of what went wrong that day and what could have been done to prevent this tragedy. What could we do though things like this happen so we can learn from them and not let them happen again. Great Book I recommend it

This book was written very well. It gives excellent detail in the account of the tragedy that took the lives of 14 brave firefighters in 1994. I cannot wait to explore the location where the incident took place when I travel to Colorado.

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