

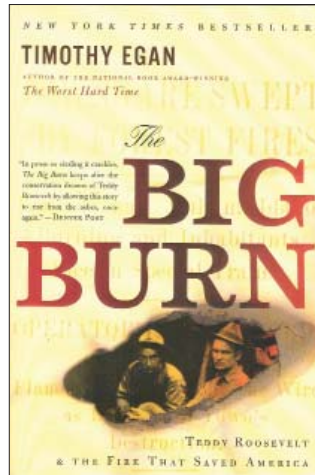
Timothy Egan. (2009). *The Big Burn; Teddy Roosevelt and the Fire That Saved America*. 324 pages.

"No living person in the United States had seen anything like the flames that roared through the Bitterroots in the summer of 1910. At its peak, the storm would consume three million acres in barely two days." Timothy Egan

Known also as "The Big Blow-Up" or "The Great Fire of 1910," the disaster was set up by an exceptionally dry season, sparked by lightning and, once the fire got going, was brought to full-blown destructive might by high winds. Eighty-five people died in the remote border area between Montana and Idaho during this natural fire storm.

As interesting and historically important as The Great Fire of 1910 was, a closer look at the subtitle gives clues to why Egan's work was named "Best Book of the Year" by the Washington Post, Philadelphia Inquirer, Entertainment Weekly and Amazon.com. Timothy Egan does more than report on a large forest fire that happened 100 years ago.

By placing the fire in political and cultural context, he has coherently organized a slice of American history not easily understood on the hit-and-miss education most of us have.



Today, most people take national parks, forests, and wilderness areas for granted. But at the turn of the century, these were areas hotly debated, and there were many politically powerful people who opposed any government control of land - who thought that corporations motivated by profit were the best stewards of our resources. Also in great debate, (and to a certain extent, still today) was how to handle fire ... allow it to burn naturally or control it?

Out of this fight came two men who did more to create and preserve public land than any others in history: Teddy Roosevelt and his chief forester Gifford Pinchot. The story of the Great Fire of 1910 itself would make a great book. Entire towns were in panic, with trains leaving remote mountain towns right ahead of the fire, and the newly formed Forrest Service struggling with lack of men and equipment. With deft hand on the pen, Timothy Egan weaves in the additional and integral stories of Roosevelt and Pinchot.

I agree with the critics. It was the best non-fiction book I read this year.

## Pioneers of Technology

Ed Pulaski

(1863-1931)

"Mr. Pulaski ... is a man of most excellent judgment ... having prospected throughout the burned area during the last 25 years ...is one of the best men to be placed in charge of a crew of men in the hills." -- 1926 Forest Report

Out of all the death and destruction of the 1910 "Big Burn" forest fire there emerged one hero in the eyes of the people: Edward C. Pulaski. Like most true heroes, he didn't consider himself one, just a guy doing his job. At the time of the fire, Pulaski was working in Wallace, Idaho, as a ranger for the recently formed U.S. Forest Service. He was in charge of about 150 men distributed over a divide between the Big Creek and Coeur d'Alene River.

When the winds kicked up and the fire basically blew up in their face, Pulaski rounded up 42 of the men and directed them to a prospector mine tunnel he knew about. The panic stricken men were reluctant to follow, and he had to use the threat of his revolver as persuasion. Getting all 42 men and two horses to lie in the tunnel, he fought off burning timbers himself until collapsing.



My pulaski just last week dug a 150' drain trench

Ed Pulaski saved all the men but was severely burned in the hands, face and one eyeball. In the days before health insurance, unemployment or workman comp, injured men were truly hurting units. Over the next 100 years, many groups have kept the pressure on the government to recognize the deeds of these early firefighters and especially Ed Pulaski. I visited Wallace, Idaho, last summer and was encouraged to see a new memorial for the 85 men lost and the placement of the Pulaski Tunnel into the National Register of Historical Places.

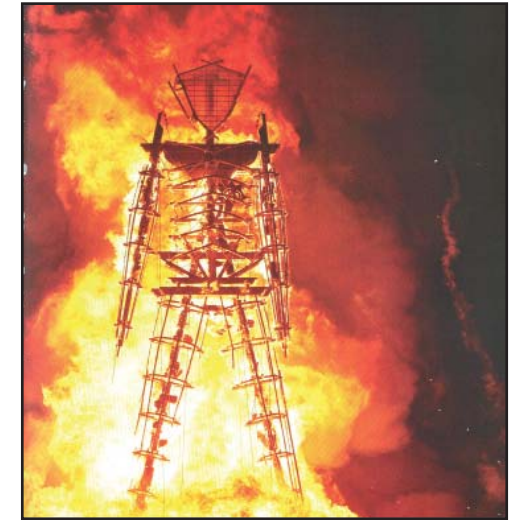
Hero aside, he earned his "Pioneer of Technology" for a tool he created after the fire. Combining a maddock and an axe, Big Ed's tool, still in use today, was so efficient that it was soon a common implement on any fire crew. My father, now 85, recalls building fire trail in the summer of 1942. About 6 feet wide, it was a barrier on the perimeter of a fire for containment. He describes the procedure: "We worked in a 30-man crew. First came the axemen, usually four, followed by a team of 6 crosscut sawyers. The pulaskis came next, with their ability to both dig and cut threw roots. Hoedads followed the pulaskis, and shovelmen finished the job. In this way we could build about 2 miles of trail a day." Straight from the horse's mouth.

## Quarter Inch Drive

A quarterly newsletter for friends and graduates of Tom Hull's shop programs

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**Burning Man.** A yearly week-long "dadaist temporary autonomous zone" in Black Rock Desert, Nevada, where 50,000 people drive mutant vehicles and stomp carbon footprints, blasting mushroom clouds off 99-foot derricks using 900 gallons of jet fuel and 2000 gallons of propane. They like fire.

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