

<https://www.toledoblade.com/Nation/2007/10/25/4-charred-bodies-found-in-migrant-camp-burned-by-Calif-wildfire.html>

## THE BLADE

26 October 2007

SAN DIEGO Four charred bodies were found Thursday in an apparent migrant camp burned by one of the wildfires raging across Southern California, authorities said.

If the fire was responsible for the deaths which authorities said was not immediately certain it would mean seven people have died in the flames that have consumed about 750 square miles since the weekend.

Border Patrol agents on routine patrol found the bodies in a wooded area near Barrett Junction, just east of San Diego and along the Mexican border, agency spokeswoman Gloria Chavez said. The area is near a major corridor for illegal immigrants who often walk hours or even days to cross into the United States from Mexico.

Authorities said they discovered the bodies Thursday afternoon but did not know how long ago the victims died.

They could have been out there a while, said Paul Parker, a spokesman for the San Diego County medical examiner's office. They were tentatively identified as three men and one woman.

The area was burned by the Harris Fire, which straddles the Mexican border. That was the same fire that claimed the life of 52-year-old Tecate man who refused to leave his house when the area was evacuated Sunday.

The other two people killed directly by the wildfires also died in San Diego County, the hardest-hit of seven counties where fires were burning.

Despite the deaths, there were hopeful signs Thursday. Firefighters took advantage of calmer winds and cooler temperatures to launch an aerial assault on several stubborn blazes.

Mandatory evacuation orders were lifted for most residential areas of San Diego. Shelters emptied at a rapid rate, and residents in some neighborhoods returned to their streets, many lined with the wreckage of melted cars.

President Bush surveyed the damage in the hard-hit community of Rancho Bernardo, where he draped his arm around a woman who had lost her home.

We want the people to know there is a better day ahead than today your life may look dismal, but tomorrow life is going to be better, said Bush, who earlier declared seven counties a major disaster area, making residents eligible for federal assistance to help them rebuild.

His visit came just hours after rescue crews found the bodies of a married couple in the rubble of a burned home in Escondido. Like the previous death, the pair had been urged to evacuate.

Neighbors told authorities they last saw the two around midnight Monday. They were reported missing sometime after that.

Sheriff's deputies on Wednesday had taken a cursory look around the couple's home and found no one inside. When the two did not turn up during the day, a search-and-rescue team was sent to the site and found one body Wednesday night and a second set of remains early Thursday.

They were identified as John Christopher Bain, 58, a mortgage broker, and his wife, Victoria Fox, 55, a teacher. A relative who did not want to be identified because she was too distraught to talk to other reporters confirmed the deaths to The Associated Press, and their names matched property records for the address where they were found.

Officials have reported 10 deaths connected to the fires; seven died of causes other than flames. At least 40 firefighters and 35 other people have been injured.

In the Los Angeles area, fire crews worked to tamp out many wildfires, including two that burned 21 homes and were now fully contained. But the focus shifted to flames still raging in Orange and San Diego counties, particularly in rural areas near the Mexico border where more evacuation orders were issued.

The total burn area across California had expanded to more than 482,000 acres about 753 square miles.

San Diego officials said the number of homes destroyed had risen to at least 1,470, about 400 more than previously reported. That would bring the number of homes destroyed in the seven affected counties to at least 1,800.

The Santa Ana winds that had fueled the flames were all but gone by Thursday, but San Diego County remained a tinderbox. Firefighters cut fire lines around sections of the major blazes, but none of the four fires was more than 40 percent contained. More than 8,500 homes were still threatened.

Towns scattered throughout the county remained on the edge of disaster, including the apple-picking region around Julian, where dozens of homes burned in 2003.

Authorities also evacuated Jamul, an upscale community of about 6,000 in a hilly region about 20 miles east of San Diego.

David and Brandy Hradecky, who defied evacuation orders with their daughters, said a small percentage of residents stayed in Jamul and worked with firefighters to save their neighbors' homes.

David Hradecky said he spent 2 days using his bulldozer to create firebreaks around seven homes. He said his young daughters even used 5-gallon buckets to put out hot spots and quench the thirst of farm animals that had been left behind.

Where are you going to go? They were evacuating the evacuee places. We know what to do. We took care of all the people's houses, said Brandy Hradecky.

To the north, crews were battling a 35,000-acre fire in northern San Diego County that was burning on Palomar Mountain.

Fred Daskoski, a spokesman for the state fire department, said there was no immediate threat to the mountain's landmark observatory, which housed the world's largest telescope when it was completed in 1908.

In the Lake Arrowhead area, fire officials said 16,000 homes remained in the path of two wildfires that had destroyed more than 300 homes.

Both fires remained out of control, but were being bombarded by aerial tankers and helicopters.