**Calabasas “Old” Fire (June 2016)**

On Saturday, June 4, 2016, at 4:00 PM, the power went off briefly and then came back on. Our phone service, Internet, and TV (all supplied by Charter) became non-existent. I got a cell phone call from Joyce who had just left here and said there was a column of smoke very near to us. I said don’t worry about it, but I went outside and there was indeed a large fire with a fast developing column of black smoke right in front down the hill towards Calabasas High School. Chris said she knows that canyon behind Adamsville St. and said that the fire would go straight up the canyon where the old growth was quite thick with dry brush. Adamsville is one block directly to the west. Sure enough, the fire came over the ridge towards us and then also up the dry brush canyon. The police showed up quickly and said we did not have to evacuate yet, but be prepared. The people on Adamsville, where most of the houses back up to that canyon, were told to get out now. Very soon, EVERY fire-fighting helicopter in Los Angeles County showed up along with one CalFire airplane:

* LA County (painted yellow) Three Sikorsky S-70A Firehawks – 1000 gallons each
* LA County (painted yellow) Five Bell 412 Helicopters – 360 gallons each
* LA City (painted red) Six firefighting helicopters(Wikipedia); *Copter 1* and *Copter 4* are both [Bell 412s](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bell_412). *Copter 2*, *Copter 3* and *Copter 5* are all [AgustaWestland AW139s](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/AgustaWestland_AW139). The final helicopter, *Copter 6*, is a [Bell 206B](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bell_206B).
* One CalFire aircraft (painted white), looks like a **Grumman S-2T 1,200 gallon airtanker**

I do not know the exact count, but I saw 60 fire engines show up in various locations in the area. The fire proceeded over the ridge between our back yard and Calabasas High School. The fire was moving downhill towards houses near Eddingham and Mulholland Highway. Two of the Firehawks showed up and dumped their fire retardant (mixture of chemical and water) and the flames disappeared. A large tanker truck showed up on the hillside, and firemen sprayed down the area. The phone, TV, and Internet returned to normal status. We did not lose electricity again. The cause of the fire was a black pickup truck that had hit a power pole on Mulholland Highway, causing the pole, the power lines, and the pole transformer to fall down. The transformer hit the ground, exploded in flames, and started fire.

For the next several hours, the helicopters flew LOW directly over our house, and dumped their loads about 100 meters to 400 meters away over the ridge. Columns of fire trucks went up Adamsville. The local TV channels 2 and 4 had full-time coverage and announced mandatory evacuations for the neighborhoods of Eddingham (false), Adamsville, and Calabasas Highlands. They missed where the fire was really dangerous: up Old Topanga Canyon Road from Mulholland Highway. Viewpoint School was surrounded by fire. Calabasas High School turned into the operations center. Large animals were directed to be evacuated to Pierce College. The fire trucks laid hose from nearby fire hydrants up into the brush areas to spray down the hot spots, and provide some insulation for structures from the fire. The TV estimates of the area were WAY off at 200 acres; the aerial view showed much more than that on fire. Fortunately, the wind was moderate at 10 kilometers per hour (6 miles per hour), and the fire therefore did not spread very rapidly. If there had been higher winds, the embers would have spread the fire all the way to the coast in Malibu. The obvious conclusion: more aerial equipment is needed!

Most of the helicopters had to cease operations shortly after sunset, but the fire seemed to be well surrounded by equipment. The news said zero percent contained; the fire seemed pretty contained to me. There were two fire engines parked at the end of Galilee St. all night next to the fire hydrant. By the next morning, June 5, everything seemed calm, but then the three big Firehawk helicopters showed up directly overhead (their sound is quite distinctive) and they started dropping fire retardant about 100 meters up the hill to the south. Chris decided to wander off to that area where she likes to go hiking and survey the fire area. She took some close-up helicopter pictures/movies and fire damage pictures there. The burning brush smell permeated the house and ash was dropping all over the place. I closed the windows, turned on the air conditioning and stayed home all day, gazing at all the aerial activity to spray fire retardant to further protect the hillside area.