



Chronicle photos by Alex Paul
Steve Brown, air operations director for the French Valley Fire, takes time to shave before supper during the final night of fire camp at East Side Park. Brown is from Husum, near White Salmon.

Wild land firefighters work hard, eat well

By Alex Paul
 Chronicle staff

French Valley Fire, near Omak, came during the 46th wild land fire season for Larry Scott, Olympia, and the 39th for John Haddon, Ellensburg.

Although officially retired from the state Department of Natural Resources, the two are part of the Washington Incident Management Team No. 2 that battled the 1,400-acre fire about 6 miles east of Omak for nearly a week.

The team set up its fire camp at East Side Park, Omak, and took over the Omak Stampede office. July 16 the group broke camp and team members headed back to their respective homes or jobs to await another call out somewhere in the state.

"Due to staffing cutbacks, they need some of the old-timers with experience for the logistics side of these camps," Scott said. "I retired in 2003 and John retired last year."

Not only an army marches on its stomach. The more than 250 firefighters and support staff are offered meals totaling more than 7,000 calories per day. The average adult usually consumes about 2,000 calories.

Breakfast is served starting at 5 a.m. Sack lunches are prepared the night before and are stored in a cooler to be doled out as teams leave for the fire line.

Serving of the evening meal starts at 5 p.m. and runs through 9 p.m., unless a fire team is hung up and can't get back to camp. At the meal tent is a long salad bar, numerous choices for drinks and dessert such as strawberry shortcake.

Entrees during the week included Salisbury steak, fried chicken, pork chops, and huge portions of barbecued ribs.

"On some fires, we've been served halibut and even prime



Fire crews eat at the East Side Park fire camp.

rib," Haddon said. "Usually on the last night of the fire camp, the cooks prepare their specialties."

Meals are prepared by a contracted company, which is paid about \$45 per day per person for all three meals.

"This isn't a big camp," Haddon said. "This size of operation can handle up to 1,000 people if needed."

In addition to an enclosed shower trailer, there are outdoor sinks and mirrors where firefighters can shave and spruce up each day.

A satellite trailer provides phone and Internet access for the team. Scott said there were about 25 phones set up at the Omak camp.

The Stampede office was used by the financial staff and the daily incident planning team.

A yurt was set up just outside the Stampede office and used as a medical tent.

"We haven't had anyone hurt on the fire line," Scott said. "One guy hurt himself in a fall from a truck at camp. Blisters can also be a problem at most fires."

Firefighters come from throughout the Northwest and bring their own tents, Scott said.

In addition to the 50 team members, Scott said local people often are hired to help shuttle items to and from the fire line and to help inspect vehicles each day. Lunches the first day were purchased locally.

Haddon said it was nice to be able to set up camp at the park, where there is a permanent infrastructure base.

"The folks from the Stampede have been wonderful to work with," Haddon said. "It's so nice to have a real building and not have to set up a mobile office or yurts."

The men said there is a daily briefing at 6 a.m. for all staff members. It lasts 15-30 minutes. Topics include weather conditions, an overview of the daily fire fighting plan and a safety message.

A written attack and safety plan also is distributed.

"I was once told that a good fire camp can actually cut the amount of time it takes to put out a fire by more than 20 percent," Scott said.