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## NEWS LOCAL

# Trapped behind the fire

Jordan MacDonald  
Npawin Journal  
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View of the fire from a nearby farm.

Tom Friske calls being trapped behind a bush fire 30 kilometers north-east of Arborfield with his friend, Trent Turcotte, and their children on May 18 “intense.”

It was around 10 am when the group first noticed smoke in the distance, but they didn't think much of it.

“We just portrayed it as maybe farmer burning stubble. You can't tell from in the bush how far the smoke is. And we were gonna take a load up and take a quad ride down the trail and back.”

At 11:30, they left the cabin they had been camping in for the May long weekend. When they reached a clearing they knew something was wrong.

“The smoke was really intense. And we shut the bikes off and we were just watching it for a few minutes and then we heard helicopters flying in. And then we knew we were in trouble. Helicopters had baskets of water and they were dumping and they weren't dumping that far away from us.”

They tried to get the attention of the helicopters, by waving their arms and flashing light at them with a piece of glass, but they didn't have any luck. They decided at that point it was time to move on, so they fuelled up their bikes and packed water and food in case they had to spend the night.

The group went south for a while until they hit an intersection.

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"Then we stopped and looked at the fire again. And then we noticed it was really getting intense and coming right towards us. The way the wind was coming. So, at that point my friend Trent, we used his phone because it has better service, so we called 911."

The plan was to get 911 to use the CERN helicopters to tell them how to get out of the way of the fire and to safety. Unfortunately, 911 didn't have the means to contact them and told Friske and Turcotte to stay at the cabin.

911 then called Scott Debiegne, Carrot River's fire chief.

"I got a call from the RCMP to tell me that there were people trapped behind the forest fire. Then 911 called me and asked me if I could go and while I was getting information, I got paged out to go."

They brought track vehicles and ATVs in case they needed to go into the bush and get them.

"Nobody knew exactly where they were or anything. So, we went and set up everything. A little bit to the west from where the fire was actually burning, to find out what was actually going on."

In the bush at that time, the group decided to "make our own judgement call."

"At that point I decided we were going to take the hard road out. It's about 15 miles through hell with my kids and my buddy and I and we made our way over to Crossen's Corner east of Carrot River. We stayed ahead of the smoke and the fire."

The cause of the fire is currently unknown. It is still going and, depending on the weather, it could keep going for some time yet, delaying the investigation.

"If we keep up on the hot, dry and windy weather, it could burn for a while and it could still do some damage. Right now, I believe it's only burnt forest," said Debiegne.

"It was very intense," said Friske. "My children held together, my friend's children held together very well and we kept their heads straight and we just kept moving forward and we didn't stop for nothing. We just kept on going, winning, pulling, we finally made our way out."

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