

# Grantham Mountain Fire

June - July, 1953

Produced by the Grantham Historical Society  
With resources of the Grantham Town Archives



The top of Grantham Mountain bears a granite scar. Its prominence resulted from a forest fire that raged on it in 1953 and erosion that occurred afterwards. What follows is the story of the conflagration and the heroic effort to put it out.



Day 1:

A heavy thunderstorm strikes in the Grantham area  
on June 21, 1953.



Day 2:

Bud Gross, the lookout on Croydon Mountain, gets several calls reporting sightings of smoke.

Day 3:

Gross gets several more calls about seeing smoke, but neither he nor other fire officers are able to see any.



Day 4:

District Fire Warden James Ricard talks with Bud Gross.

Day 5:

Grantham Fire Warden Merton Pillsbury checks on reports of smoke in Corbin Park but finds none.



Day 6:

Bud Gross gets a call saying smoke is coming from Grantham Mountain, not Croydon Mountain. His wife Rita checks.



Day 7:

District Fire Chief James Ricard of Caanan (right) briefs Fire Wardens Frank Berquist of Goshen (middle) and Merton Pillsbury of Grantham (left).



Pillsbury leads a group searching for smoke.  
Suddenly, whoosh, they have plenty of it.



Pilot Harold Buker of New London also spots the fire and continues to help with aerial observation. The smoke in Grantham is so thick you can't see.



Day 8:

Fire fighters from Grantham and nearby towns work in an area without roads, trails or water.



Fire breaks are hacked through heavily wooded terrain.



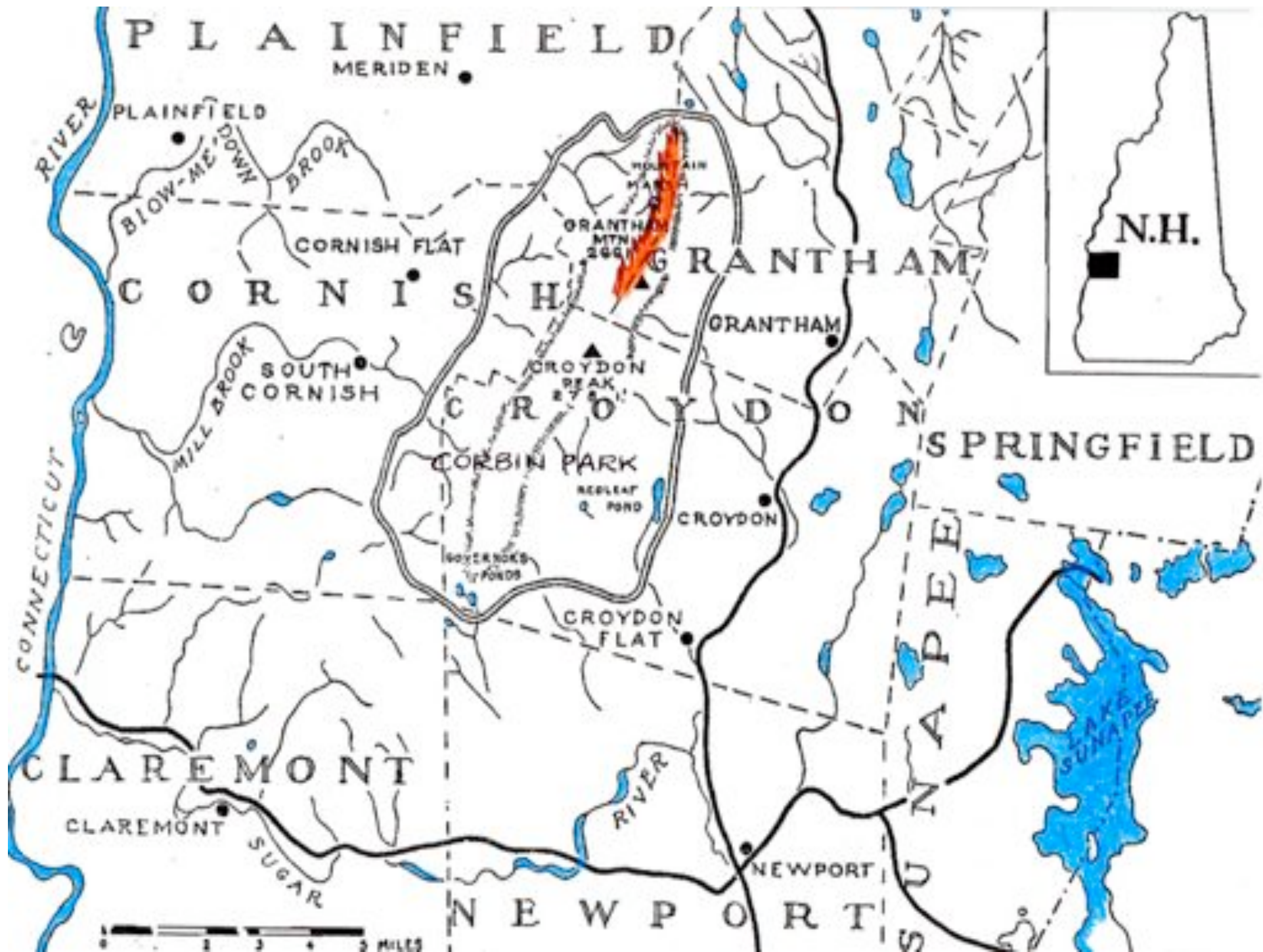
Day 9:

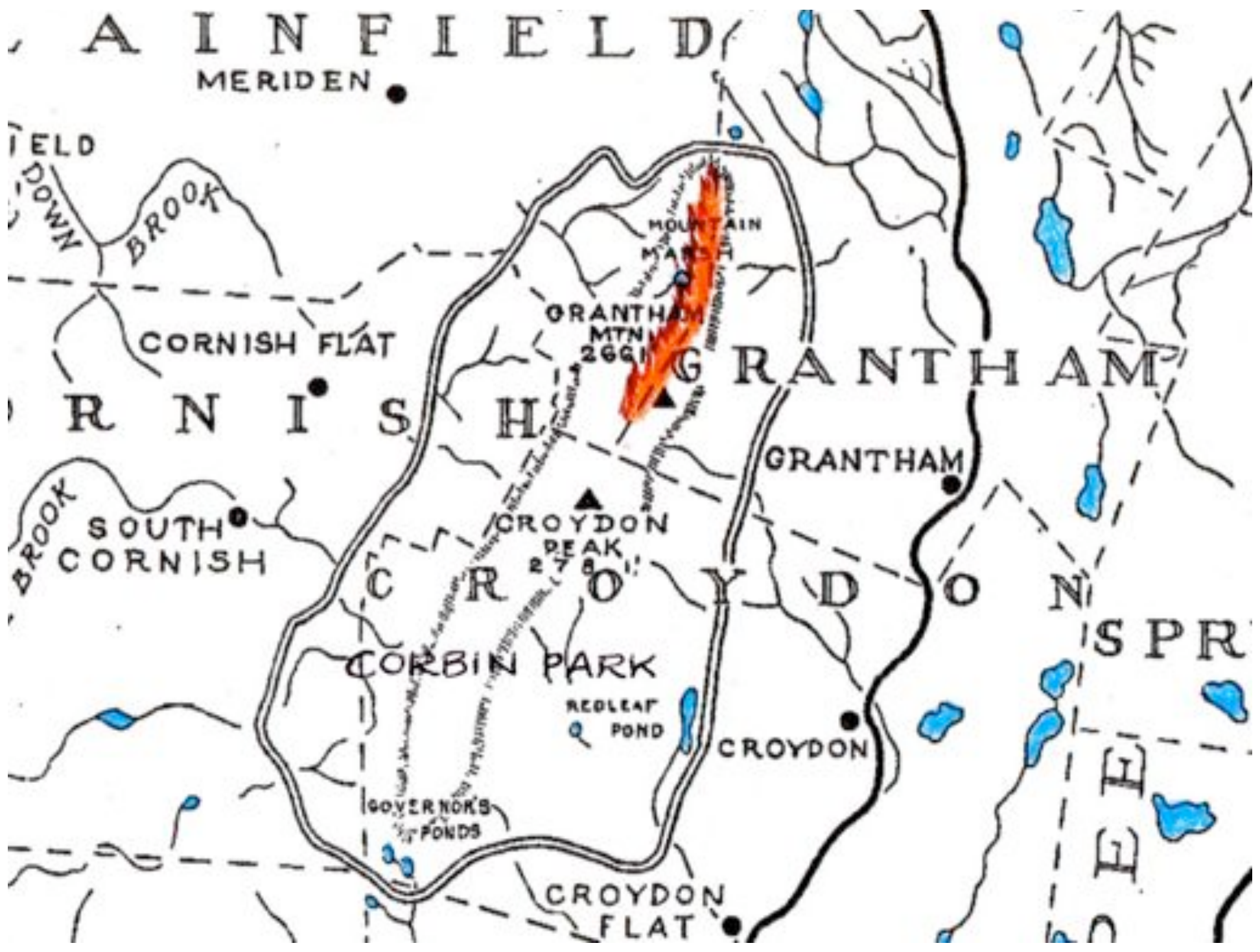
The fire, with a fast moving front, outdistances the crew as they struggle to flank it.



**A crew of ten, including Pete Garrity and Rick Merrill of Hanover, are momentarily trapped by flames.**

The fire ranges within Corbin Park from the northern point near Lily Pond along the ridge for about 3 1/2 miles to northwest of the town of Grantham.





AINFIELD

MERIDEN

FIELD  
DOWN  
BROOK

CORNISH FLAT

R N I S H

BROOK  
SOUTH  
CORNISH

GRANTHAM  
MTN  
2661

GRANTHAM

GRANTHAM

CROYDON  
PEAK  
218

CORBIN PARK

REDLEAF  
POND

CROYDON

GOVERNORS  
PONDS

CROYDON  
FLAT

S P R E Y

R E S E R V O I R



Chief Ricard, in command of the whole operation, locates a position for Special Deputy Ed Bennet.



Day 11:

Governor Hugh Gregg appeals to President Eisenhower for federal aid.



Day 12:

The President declares New Hampshire a disaster area



Day 13:

359 soldiers are sent from Fort Devens, Mass. to help fight the fire.



Day 14:

Fire fighting equipment is issued to the Fort Devins soldiers.



Smoke from Grantham Mountain hangs over  
Croydon Peak.



Day 15:

A detachment, under command of Lt. Col. Robert McKitham, works shifts on the east side of the mountain.



An Army Reserve helicopter readies to take over the aerial observation.



Day 16:

As the fire spreads, Newport National Guardsman, Corp. Alfred Duford of Springfield, reports its status to headquarters base.



200 airmen from Grenier Field in Manchester help fight the blaze. Officers and civilians confer.



10-wheel army trucks bringing men and supplies to the fire, take their toll on the few dirt roads going up to the mountain.



Hungry fire eaters grab food at base headquarters in Croydon. More than 5,000 sandwiches are made.



Day 17:

Governor Gregg tours the fire lines.



At various times the fire is reported out, but it continues to smolder and occasionally flare up.

Finally, the fire is declared out. It has consumed over 1,570 acres of timber with a loss of \$15,000. The cost to hold and extinguish the fire is \$152,815.



Grantham Mountain, today, remains barren of vegetation at the top where the fire burned. The thin layer of exposed soil quickly eroded away exposing the gray ledges of granite underneath.

# GRANTHAM MT. FIRE

June-July 1953. Acreage: 1570  
COST TO HOLD & EXTINGUISH  
\$ 152,815<sup>00</sup>

CAUSE: LIGHTNING

IMMEDIATE LOSS OF GROWTH  
VALUED AT \$15,000<sup>00</sup>

LONG TIME LOSS: NO SOIL FOR  
FUTURE TREES  
WATER & A PERMANENT SCAR IN  
OUR GREEN NEW HAMPSHIRE

## GRANTHAM MT. BURN

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Fire expenses cost Grantham \$24,239, of which \$21,408 was reimbursed by the state.



“Were going to see these fires again. People are going to be lulled to sleep by rain and no fires. It could happen right over again. People are quite reluctant to accept that.”

Fire Chief James Ricard



In recent years, manning of Croydon Mountain lookout tower has been sporadic.

# Grantham Historical Society

The End

