

"A little before sunrise I descended the mountain to the springs, and, being very tired, after taking a refreshing draught of the cold water I lay down on the rock by the side of the water and fell fast asleep. When I awoke the sun had already set; but although darkness was fast gathering over the mountain, I was surprised to see a bright light flickering against its sides. A glance assured me that the mountain was on fire, and, starting up, I saw at once the danger of my position. The bottom had been fired about a mile below the springs, and but a short distance from where I had secured my animals. A dense cloud of smoke was hanging over the gorge, and presently, a light air springing up from the east, a mass of flame shot up into the sky and rolled fiercely up the stream, the belt of dry brush on its banks catching fire and burning like tinder. The mountain was already invaded by the devouring element, and two wings of flame spread out from the main stream, which roaring along the bottom with the speed of a racehorse, licked the mountain-side, extending its long line as it advanced. The dry pines and cedars hissed and cracked, as the flame, reaching them, ran up their trunks, and spread amongst the limbs, whilst the long waving grass underneath was a sea of fire. From the rapidity with which the fire advanced I feared that it would already have reached my animals, and hurried at once to the spot as fast as I could run. The prairie itself was as yet untouched, but the surrounding, ridges were clothed in fire, and the mules, with stretched ropes, were trembling with fear. Throwing the saddle on my horse, and the pack on the steadiest mule, I quickly mounted, leaving on the ground a pile of meat, which I had not time to carry with me.

"The fire had already gained the prairie, and its long, dry grass was soon a sheet of flame, but, worse than all, the gap through which I had to retreat was burning. Setting spurs into Panchito's sides, I dashed him at the burning bush, and, though his mane and tail were singed in the attempt, he gallantly charged through it. Looking back, I saw the mules huddled together on the other side, and evidently fearing to pass the blazing barrier. As, however, to stop would have been fatal, I dashed on, but before I had proceeded twenty yards my old hunting mule, singed and smoking, was at my side, and the others close behind her.

"On all sides I was surrounded by fire. The whole scenery was illuminated, the peaks and distant ridges being as plainly visible as at noonday. The bottom was a roaring mass of flame, but on the other side, the prairie being more bare of cedar-bushes, the fire was less fierce and presented the only way of escape. To reach it, however, the creek had to be crossed, and the bushes on the banks were burning fiercely, which rendered it no easy matter; moreover, the edges were coated above the water with thick ice, which rendered it still more difficult. I succeeded in pushing Panchito into the stream, but, in attempting to climb the opposite bank, a blaze of fire was puffed into his face, which caused him to rear on end, and, his hind feet flying away from him at the same moment on the ice, he fell backwards into the middle of the stream, and rolled over me in the deepest water. Panchito rose on his legs and stood trembling with affright in the middle of the stream, whilst I dived and groped for my rifle, which had slipped from my hands, and of course had sunk to the bottom. After a search of some minutes I found it, and, again mounting, made another attempt to cross a little farther down, in which I succeeded, and, followed by the mules, dashed through the fire and got safely through the line of blazing brush.

"Once in safety, I turned in my saddle and had leisure to survey the magnificent spectacle. The fire had extended at least three miles on each side the stream, and the mountain was one sheet of flame. A comparatively thin line marked the progress of the devouring element, which, as there was no wind to direct its course, burned on all sides, actually roaring as it went."

George F. Ruxton, *Adventures in Mexico and the Rocky Mountains* (London: John Murray, 1849), 262-263.