



- [Home](#)
- [Impressum](#)
- [Datenschutzerklärung](#)
- [Droits d'auteur & Copyright :](#)
- [A propos](#)



The Fatal Forest Fire – remembering the “1949 Mega fire” in the „Forêt des Landes” (South West France)

13. Juli 2009

In August 1949 the „Forêt des Landes“ in Southwest France near the Atlantic coast between Bordeaux and Arcachon was destroyed by a mega-forest fire – 50.000 ha of forest land were burnt – and 82 people killed. This was the most deadly forest fire in Europe in modern times (and perhaps also in historical times). Some days ago I dedicated a posting in French with the title „1949 – l’incendie meurtrier dans la Forêt des Landes“ to this notable fire event. The fatal fire event burnt the *Forêt the Landes* (in English sometimes called [Landes Forest](#)), a large forest ranging the Atlantic coast from the Gironde estuary to Arcachon in the South, – a forest dominated by 90% of [Maritime Pine](#) (*Pinus pinaster*). This forest fire has been completely forgotten by the collective memory in France (and also in the rest of Europe). Till today there is no article neither in the French nor English Wikipedia describing this notable forest fire event.

For people reading French and interested in European fire history I would suggest to read the new book of Joan Deville « *L’incendie meurtrier – dans la forêt des Landes en août 1949* » retracing the fire history of this murderous fire. In my [French billet](#) there is a more detailed résumé of the book. The book is not a „fire ecology reader“ – it’s written from the view point of the fire-fighters – it’s a fire fighter perspective – and most of the 82 victims of the fire were firefighters (voluntary fire brigade men, and service men from the French army) but also a fire ecologist, a geographer, a forester can learn much about the behavior of such a fire, which I would call a „Mega fire“ or „Mega forest fire event“ from reading the book. This fire had also another quality than most other European forest fires – which are mostly Mediterranean fires – a very high fuelloading in some way comparably to what we knew from pacific coast fires in the U.S. (Washington, Oregon, Montana) and Canada. A European mega fire – causing 82 dead, 50.000 ha of Maritime Pine forest and 700 ha of prairies burnt – and not linked to any „Global Warming Discussion“. This shows clearly that in dry and hot weather conditions large fire events also happened in non-mediterranean European forests – and that this could happen occasionally – or has happened occasionally in historical times – as to take another example the 1975 Lüneburger Forest Fire in Lower Saxony (Germany) (see my posting [Feux de forêts et lectures de paysages méditerranéens: \(Écologie et biogéographie des forêts du bassin méditerranéen ; The Nature of Mediterranean Europe – an Ecological History ; Le feu dans la nature – mythes et réalité](#)) which the German collective memory has also forgot. But as I wrote in [l’incendie meurtrier](#) , – if global warming scenarios for Europe are correct, we would have more dry and hot weather conditions – and the probability to have increasing forest fire risks in non-mediterranean Europe would increase. In the [French posting](#) I wrote that « *Je pense même que l’ incendie des Landes, ou le feu de la Lüneburger Heide pourrait être un peu le modèle de feu*



de forêts auxquels nous devons peut être de plus en plus faire face avec les changements climatiques en dehors de écosystèmes méditerranéens » which means basically that the forest fire of the Landes 1949 or the forest fire in Lüneburger Heide could be a model for coming fire events in non-mediterranean european forests linked to global warming. So the book of Joan Deville, even if it's in French would merit a large audience.

This is a blog posting – not an scientific paper – for an actual scientific approach concerning future fire risks in Europe read the new paper of Krawchuk et al (2009) „[Global Pyrogeography: the Current and Future Distribution of Wildfire](#)“ . I have myself written a little paper in 2003 (Neff 2003) forecasting increasing fire risks linked to global warming for some middle European forest region . Concerning „*the fatal Mega fire of the Forêt des Landes*“ – one should perhaps write a scientific review paper of this historical fire – because if more fire experts will share my conviction that the „Grand Incendie de la Forêt des Landes“ as the 1949 fire is often called in French, is really a historical model for expected forest fires due to global warming in non-mediterranean European forests – we should know more about this historical fire event on the South-West Atlantic coast of

France. Perhaps I should start something like this with interested colleagues after recovery from my accident – because I am still lying in my sickbed in [Grünstadt](#) – looking out on the big birch in our garden – and writing my bedside blog „[Dépêches du grand bouleau](#)„.

Sources:

Deville, J. (2009) : L'incendie meurtrier – dans la forêt des Landes en août 1949. Paris (les Éditions des Pompiers de France), (ISBN 978-2-916079-20-2)

[Krawchuk MA, Moritz MA, Parisien M-A, Van Dorn J, Hayhoe K \(2009\): Global Pyrogeography: the Current and Future Distribution of Wildfire. PLoS ONE 4\(4\): e5102. oi:10.1371/journal.pone.0005102](#)

Neff, C., Scheid, A. (2003): Kontrollierte Feuer in Natur und Landschaftspflege: – Erfahrungen aus dem Mittleren Schwarzwald (Raumschaft Schramberg) und den mediterranen Pyrenäen (Pyrénées Orientales/Region Prades) Südfrankreichs. In: Venturelli, R.C., Müller, F. (Eds): Paesaggio culturale e biodiversità. Principi generali, metodi, proposte operative. Giardini e Paesaggio, 7, Firenze, 163 – 177, (ISBN 88-222-5272-1), (KITopen DOI : [10.5445/IR/1000121841](#)).

Christophe Neff, Grünstadt le 13.7.2009

P.S.: For French reading readers of this „fatal fire“ article interested in natural hazards & risks I would also suggest to have look on the [Gestion des Risques et Crises Blog](#) . This seems to be a very professional blog!

P.S: (18.08.2026): As this blog post is one of the most read on *Paysages* (see, for example, [Paysages – dix-septième année d'existence sur la toile, donc déjà sept ans sur wordpress.com](#)), I have corrected all the links, etc., in order to print a PDF. This PDF will be archived in KITopen. (KITopen DOI: [10.5445/IR/1000195082](#)).

Teilen mit:

- [X](#)
- [Facebook](#)
-

Gefällt mir Wird geladen ...

Ähnliche Beiträge

Veröffentlicht in [Actualité](#), [Changements Globaux - Global Change](#), [Dépêches du grand bouleau](#), [En anglais/ in English](#), [Feux de forêts-Forest fires](#), [Forêt](#), [landscape](#), [Livres-Bücher-Books](#), [Science](#)



Veröffentlicht von cneffpaysages

[Zeige alle Beiträge von cneffpaysages](#)

[◀ Previous Brentano's unhappy end](#)

[Next ▶ Mannemer Dreck- traumhafte Zeiten – eine autobiographische Zeitreise mit Musikbegleitung nach Mannheim](#)

Ein Kommentar zu „The Fatal Forest Fire – remembering the “1949 Mega fire” in the „Forêt des Landes” (South West France)“



1. **Capmargaret** sagt:
[15. März 2010 um 16:43](#)

Hello:

I just came over your very interesting post today.

I just let a comment to inform you that in the Landes, the forestowners and forestworkers never forgot the megafire of 1949 as you call it or the „Cestas Fire“ or „1949 fire“ as we do.

There were several big fires between 1940 and 1949 (due to WWII and its human consequences), In 10 years, we had approx. 350 000 ha of forestland burnt. But wild fires were always a real danger in this region.

And in 1945, we setted up a specific organization to protect the forest against fire (DFCI). You can have some information on this website:

http://www.feudeforet.org/francais/qui/qui_historique.php

[Like](#)Like

[Antworten](#)

Hinterlasse einen Kommentar

Paysages le blog de Christophe Neff. Paysages der Blog von Christophe Neff. Paysages the Blog published by Christophe Neff

Aktuelle Beiträge

- [Blognotiz 05.08.2026: Der Waldfrieden – Ruhe tanken im Hochschwarzwald](#)
- [Blognotice 26.07.2026 : une odeur de brûlé à Port Leucate](#)
- [Blognotiz 25.07.2026: Bemerkungen zur Odyssee und dem Hund Argos](#)
- [Blognotice 11.07.2026 : feux de forêts et canicule dans le Midi français](#)
- [Blognotiz 29.06.2026: Canicule – Hitze](#)

Archiv

- [August 2026](#)
- [Juli 2026](#)
- [Juni 2026](#)
- [Mai 2026](#)
- [April 2026](#)
- [März 2026](#)
- [Februar 2026](#)
- [Januar 2026](#)
- [Dezember 2025](#)
- [November 2025](#)
- [Oktober 2025](#)
- [September 2025](#)
- [August 2025](#)
- [Juli 2025](#)
- [Juni 2025](#)
- [Mai 2025](#)
- [April 2025](#)
- [März 2025](#)
- [Februar 2025](#)
- [Januar 2025](#)
- [Dezember 2024](#)
- [November 2024](#)
- [Oktober 2024](#)
- [September 2024](#)
- [August 2024](#)
- [Juli 2024](#)
- [Juni 2024](#)
- [April 2024](#)