

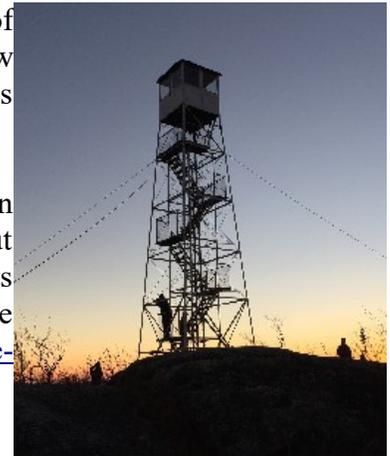


**Forest Fire Lookout Association
New York State Chapter
November 2020**

November can seem like a month that is perfect for winding down, we have shorter daylight hours, the fire tower steward programs have ended, trail work has waned due to weather, and temperatures are less conducive to hanging around and looking at the view. Historically, November 1st was often the end of seasonal employment for the Observer. Once he or she had everything closed up for the season, they were off to another seasonal job such as logging, snow plowing, guiding hunters or other opportunities for a paycheck. Yet, much does go on behind the scenes in November. Wrapping up year end reports, counting visitor numbers, and most importantly making plans for next year can keep one busy for several weeks. Your State Chapter is busy with all of those things and ask if you have suggestions for next year. Would you please let us know how many visitors you had or any other pertinent comments.

And the winner is..... Yanina Levchinsky-Grimmond with her photo of Hadley at sunset in waning light! Congratulations Yana! Our FFLA New York State Chapter Facebook page photo contest got lots of entries this month. Thank you all for your wonderful submissions and for voting!

Hudson Valley Fire Towers: The November 2020 issue of the Hudson Valley Magazine wrote about fire towers. I was happy to see the press but saddened that no comment was made about all the volunteer efforts involved in these towers or the graffiti in the fire towers pictured in the article. <https://hvmag.com/things-to-do/hudson-valley-hikes-trails-fire-towers/>



California and Colorado wildfires finally caught a bit of a break from the weather when snows blanketed the terrain. This article illustrates well what things were like before the snow: <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/10/22/us/colorado-wildfires.html>. New York State was able to offer some assistance. From the Ranger Report:

Fighting Wildfires: On Oct. 16, DEC welcomed back the State's third team of Forest Rangers, staff, and volunteers deployed to help battle and contain wildfires raging in western states. The wildland firefighting crew began their assignment on September 30th. The crew includes a DEC Forest Ranger crew boss and nine firefighters from the ranks of Forest Rangers and other DEC programs. The crew joined federal, state, and local fire agencies battling wildfires in Gibbons, South Dakota, and was tasked with securing control lines. In addition, three DEC Forest Rangers assisted in fighting fires in California and Colorado. One Ranger was assigned to the August Complex fire in California, while another served as Task Force Leader for the Castle fire in California. A third Ranger served as Ordering Manager for the Williams Fork fire in Colorado. The returning crews of New York Forest Rangers, staff, and volunteers are: Robert Prackajlo, Forest Ranger, Crew Boss, Brendan Aschmutat, Aimee Bills, Michael Giocondo, Joseph Hess, Captain Jaime Laczko, David Nally, Hannah O'Connor, Jeremy Oldroyd, Kyle Olson, John Rusher, Neilson Snye, Daniel Wehn.

A fourth crew left on Oct. 17 for deployment from the Rocky Mountain Area Coordination Center in Denver. On November 3rd, DEC welcomed back firefighters from the Divisions of Forest Protection, Lands and Forests, and Fish and Wildlife that were deployed to help battle and contain wildfires raging in western states. The crew flew to Denver, Colorado, on Oct. 17 for deployment from the Rocky Mountain Coordination Center and were initially assigned to the Cameron Peak fire for nighttime operations, patrol, and structure defense. Their second assignment was at the East Troublesome fire for daytime operations. The crew was reassigned to Cameron Peak due to sub-freezing temperatures and heavy snow. The returning crew includes a DEC Forest Ranger crew boss and nine firefighters: Scott Jackson, Mark Brand, James Canevari, Aaron Graves, Tyler Kulikowski, Kramer Kwaczala, Gary Miller, Tyler Mitchell, Joseph Nelson, Arthur Perryman.

Forest Rangers: Last month I asked a question of the reader – When was the last time you saw a Forest Ranger out on patrol when you were hiking? I did not in any way mean to suggest that a Forest Ranger was not doing his or her job, but rather I was wondering if the time they have available to do patrols is waning. I know they are very, very busy with search and rescue and have some compelling numbers to illustrate that. I thought perhaps your answers about patrol encounters might also illustrate how busy they have been with SAR. Indeed, the feedback I did get from readers included answers such as “1995” and “fairly often while on the water” and many readers mentioned that they had seen retired forest rangers out on the trail.

Tower and Trail Closures

Cathedral Rock Fire Tower: Fire tower and trail continues to be closed to the public.

Stillwater Fire Tower: Fire tower and trail continues to be closed through December 20th for hunting season.

Spruce Fire Tower: Fire tower and trail continues to be closed for northern zone big game hunting season, through December 6th.

Berry Hill: Closed to the public during restoration work from October 19th until further notice.

Goodnow Fire Tower: The fire tower cab is closed to the public until further notice. The trail is open.

Rock Rift Fire Tower: Trail is closed until 12/22. Fire Tower remains closed.

Around the State

Lyon Mountain: Due to a number of factors, our fall visit to Lyon Mountain for trail work got delayed and postponed a few times. In the end, due to Covid, just Tom and I went up to do the work. We also carried up some new safety wire to replace some that had fallen off nearly two years ago. This tower gets a significant amount of snow and ice build up on the wire, so we hope it lasts a while. We were saddened to see how often the visitors have been cutting off the switchbacks on the trail, creating a real mess in the upper boreal forest. In our report to the DEC, we made mention of this and hope to do something in the future to mitigate this issue. We also suggested that a short side trail could be made to the site of the former Observer's cabin. The foundation is still quite visible and I think this brings an important human aspect to the history of fire towers.

Kane: With an extended period of lovely fall weather, we were able to take 2 of our granddaughters on a hike to Kane Fire tower. We enjoy being out with them, but also like the opportunity to see the world through their young eyes as we tend to get a bit “biased” once we have been somewhere a few times. Some fire towers, and Kane is one of them, are the perfect place to introduce the next generation to trail etiquette and safety. First, there is a privy at the trailhead, a clean one. This is an important item for young visitors to have available after a long ride in the car. We are pleased to say thank you to the DEC who put this in last year after our discussions in a winter meeting about the lack of such. We looked at the trail signage and markers and discussed what it all means and we decided to go up the red trail. Instructions from us included that they stay within sight of us, watch for markers and always stop at one so they do not get too far ahead. Those instructions led us to realize how poorly marked this trail is in places. To us as adults, we could follow this trail blindly, but as exuberant children with lots of energy to head up a trail, it is easy to get off trail or separated due to a lack of markers. I will be discussing this with the DEC at our winter meeting. Once at the top, we waited our turn to climb the fire tower due to Covid-19 guidelines, used hand sanitizer and enjoyed a snack near the bottom of the tower while waiting. Funny thing about those snacks, it does not matter if you are a young person or an adult, hiking always encourages an appetite! Finally it was our turn and those girls went right up the tower without hesitation and we found the inside of the cab continues to be free of graffiti – yeah! They admired the view and we talked a bit about if you were the Observer and you saw smoke what you would do (we also had the luxury of a map in our car to reiterate this at the trailhead). We walked over to the cabin, but they were not impressed with what they saw and of course, we are not either.



At our winter meeting we will be setting a new date for work on the cabin next year. Our ultimate goal is to have a volunteer presence at this site to interpret for these young visitors. Would you be interested in being a volunteer steward? Please consider it and let me know. And please, please, please take a child to visit a fire tower!

Hurricane: I read reports and concerns about a helicopter that was seen over Hurricane this past month. A quick check in with the busy friends group found out it was the State flying up our roll of fencing and removing the excess lumber that was on the summit. Thanks for the info Mary Jean! The Friends Group was very busy clearing some large blowdowns on the different trails to the summit this fall. Thank you for your work!

Poke O Moonshine: From their 2020 Fall Newsletter - “2020 was a very different summer, as all of us have been challenged by the pandemic. The biggest impact of the pandemic, on Poke-O, was the explosion in the number of hikers. Use crept up in April, and by August was “off the charts”. It became usual to have 125 hikers on the summit on a summer Saturday, double the usual number. Our Tower Steward, Ivy Cerro, a very outgoing personality, took them all in stride and engaged them as a welcoming and educational presence.” In Ivy's words - “From sharing Leave No Trace principles, to discussing the history of the Adirondacks, Poke-O-Moonshine, and fire towers, I had the privilege of sharing crucial information that protected our wonderful mountain and sparked many thought-provoking conversations about sustaining our environment.”

St. Regis: The Friends of St. Regis had a very busy year and shared their year end report with me. Thanks so very much to all of you for the hours you put into this wonderfully refurbished tower this year! “Rich and Bob have completed all the priming projects. There were two different aspects to the work. The most difficult work was removing the PT lumber and priming between the lumber and the galvanized steel. They worked on this over the last two seasons, making multiple trips to the summit and putting many long days in. The other priming they accomplished was to cold spray galvanize all the various site drilled holes in the tower. This required removing bolts and spraying zinc into the holes and then replacing the bolts. The work on these two projects revealed that corrosion had been occurring in both circumstances.

-Rich has purchased the paint for the finish painting of the tower. That said, this project may need to be accomplished next season.

-Jack, Jay Swartz and I met this week to work out the details for fabricating the panoramic panels and mounting them on the tower. The next step is to make a simple full size mock-up and take it to the summit for a trial fit. I’m hoping we can accomplish that soon and get this project done.

-The annual lighting was a huge success with Bob and Janelle leading the effort on the summit and being joined by others. This was our fourth year participating in this statewide event. Jan and I arrived at our usual viewing spot on Upper St. Regis Lake just a little before 9. We usually have it all to ourselves, but this year when we got there professional photographer Gary Dean was already setup with two tripods. He took scores of photos during the event and a few days later shared a beautiful image to our Facebook page. I have not seen any other of his photos. Janelle took some wonderful photos on the summit and also shared them on Facebook. During the lighting, Rich, Nancy and Ed attended the viewing event at Lake Clear Lodge. They reported that it was a also a successful affair.

-As you know, we did not have any paid summit stewards this year. Bob has volunteered a couple of times and reported that the summit was very busy. Despite there being dedicated DEC funding for this, with the NYS budget issues we may not receive funding next season either, time will tell.

Dickinson Hill: On what was likely one of the coldest days we have ever done so, we met another volunteer (thank you Adam) at Dickinson Hill fire tower this past month to paint over graffiti. The amount of graffiti on the inside of the cab had gotten way out of hand, so with the permission of the Park and the Friends of Grafton Lakes groups we were able to address the walls on this cold day, after brushing aside some snow. If any of you see anyone involved in the act of doing this, please let them know it is a crime and subject to penalties!



Beebe Hill: While we were in the area, we went on down to Beebe Hill. I had mixed feelings about this visit. We only saw 2 others, a father and son riding their bikes around the trails. I am glad to see this area get some mixed use. In addition, to hiking, it seems like a great place for cross-country skiing and mountain biking.



These additional uses should make this a place people want to visit and to take care of. Instead, this tower and cabin now seem to be getting some visitors who would rather destroy than take care. The amount of garbage and graffiti was sad to see. An excerpt from a NYSDEC document on Fire Observation Stations dated August 1965 requires the following of a Fire Tower Observer - "He maintains the tower and cabin in a neat and clean condition and is held responsible for the proper care and use of all State property assigned to his station." We need to have someone acting in the role of Observer/Steward in 2020. I will be reaching out to DEC to see what we can do and I would also like to reach out to all of you to see if you would be willing to help too?

Holiday shopping: Many mistakenly think when they purchase a fire tower patch or t-shirt that they are supporting a fire tower. Sometimes you are, but this is not always the case, so I encourage all of you to consider where you purchase your fire tower merchandise this holiday season or to consider where you may send a year end donation. Spend a few moments and do some research, see if there is a Friends Group you can support by making a donation, purchasing a patch, cap, t-shirt or a book. We featured a book of the month for several years here in our newsletters. If you would like to take a look through some old newsletters and get an idea for a book for a gift you can view them on our web page in our newsletter archives: <http://nysffla.org/news.html>



Support the FFLA -From the national office: *Sadly our Western Conference didn't happen this year, but during the planning stages, Howard Verschoor purchased 30th Anniversary mugs for the conference. He is now offering them for sale. \$15 each or \$20 for two with shipping. He also has tower earrings for sale. Please contact Howard directly for sales at lookoutoregon@gmail.com*

We also have NYS 100 year patches still available, give someone a membership, buy them a hat! Visit the national website for options: <http://ffla.org/index.html> The FFLA is selling a 2021 calendar. The contest to choose the photos for the calendar just closed. As soon as I hear the calendars are ready, I will let you know.

Happy Thanksgiving – I am so thankful for the support that this chapter receives. We love the feedback, memories, assistance, help in the field, donations that all of you have given us. I hope you are able to celebrate a happy and healthy Thanksgiving with your family.

Laurie Rankin, Director
 New York State Chapter FFLA
<http://www.nysffla.org>