



**Forest Fire Lookout Association
New York State Chapter
April 2021**

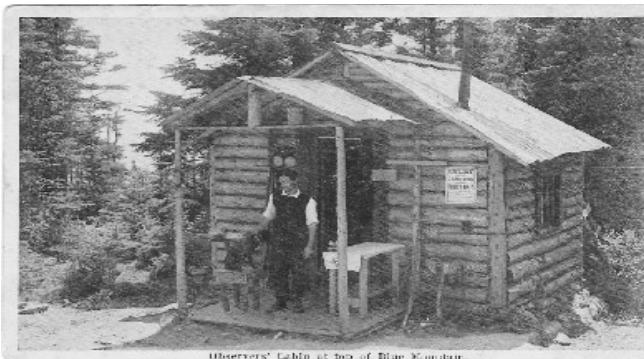


April – Full on spring in New York State may mean anything from 80 degrees to heavy, wet snow. Those 80 degree temperatures, low humidity and spring winds can certainly mean high fire danger and those wet, heavy snows can mean mud. We get it all! April 2021 has been no different. As I type, there is up to a foot of snow predicted in the high peaks tonight and yet wildfires have been around all month too. Those warmer temperatures mean spring flowers are starting to show themselves, the trees are budding out and we all need a cool drink to quench our thirst. Spring Water was very important to the Fire Tower Observer. Obtaining and storing a supply was often a great deal of work. Some clever devices were worked out for this. Steve Canfield, Former Observer at Graham Fire Tower, said he caught water from the gutters for the Observer's cabin. He said there was a low basement with a cement water storage tank that caught water from the gutters and supplied the hand pump to the kitchen sink. Many milk cans became water storage containers. While the spring water was very important to a Fire Tower Observer, it may have been just as important that their canine companions had water too.

This month's Facebook photo contest asked for photos of springs along fire tower trails, and the winner was Yana Levchinsky-Grimmon, who submitted this great photo of the spring along the way to Hunter Mtn. Fire Tower. While her canine companion, Mia, looks quite fierce in this photo, I suspect she was just thirsty. I have hiked with Mia before and she was a very pleasant dog. Thanks to all who posted spring photos and congratulations to Yana! Next month we will feature canines and fire towers in our contest.

This contest inadvertently brought me to the consideration of canine companions that Observers had with them. Many of our historical photos show a dog in them. Gus Stewart often had his dog Trixie with him at Balsam Lake. Even postcards of Observers had their dogs with them – see our Paul Hartmann collection under Blue and Hadley. [Http://nysffa.org](http://nysffa.org)

Dogs were faithful friends, good hunters, and must have helped to pass some of the long and lonely hours on the mountain tops.



Spring Fire Season 2021

The NYS burn ban remains in place through May 14th. Spring Fire Season is in full swing, though we have seen some respite in the last few days. There have been several brush fires/wildfires across the state. The following are from the Ranger Reports with dates noted:

3-16: Columbia County - On Mar. 12 at 10:30 p.m., DEC's Central Dispatch received a request from Columbia County 911 for Forest Ranger support for a wildfire in the town of Hillsdale. Forest Ranger Gullen responded. The brush fire was approximately eight acres and fire crews were able to contain it by constructing a fire line with water support. Due to heavy winds, hot spots flared up on the hilltop, extending mop up operations.

3-16: Region 3 Forest Rangers also responded to three small wildfires recently in Sullivan, Westchester, and Putnam counties. The largest was about five acres in size.

3-30-21: Chenango County Wildfires: On Mar. 22 and 23, Region 7 Forest Rangers responded to multiple wildfires in Onondaga, Broome, and Chenango counties to assist local fire departments with fire suppression and enforcement. In a few cases, the cause of the fire was determined to be someone burning in violation of DEC fire regulations. Fire Rangers issued tickets after the fires were put out.

3-31: ECO Report: Since the beginning of the ban, ECOs in Greene County have responded to eight open burn calls with tickets issued for burning construction and demolition (C&D) debris, violating the burn ban, and failing to remain in attendance of a campfire

4-6: Madison County: On Mar. 30, Region 7 Forest Rangers responded to wildfires in the towns of Maine and Fenner to assist local fire departments with fire suppression efforts. In both cases, the cause of the fire was determined to be someone violating wildfire regulations. Due to dry conditions and high winds, the fires quickly burned out of control until the fire departments and Rangers arrived. Tickets were issued for the violations

4-6: Niagara County: On Apr. 4, at 2:30 p.m., Ranger Kennedy received a call from the local fire department at the scene of a grass fire behind the target range in the Tonawanda Wildlife Management Area. Ranger Kennedy responded to assist with suppression and mapping the size of the fire. After cold trailing the edge, Ranger Kennedy determined the fire burned 8.9 acres of land. By 6:45 p.m., the fire was classified as in patrol status.

4-13: Wildland Fire: "On April 8 at 2:50 p.m., two Forest Rangers responded to the town of Constantia to assist local fire departments with a 16.5-acre wildfire. The fire was put into patrol status late the evening and Ranger returned to patrol the fire for several days until it was declared out on April 11."

No fires in NYS were as significant as what our neighbors in New Jersey had to deal with: <https://wildfiretoday.com/tag/new-jersey/> We hope the injured firefighter has recovered. New Jersey has quite a history of wildfires: <https://www.jerseysbest.com/community/on-the-front-lines-elite-n-j-forest-fire-service-charged-with-protecting-life-and-land/>

In an effort to remind people of high fire danger, our old friend Smokey Bear is now a resident at the Caroga Lake Fire Department, home to nearby Kane Mtn. Fire Tower. From the NYS Ranger Report of 4-13 - "On April 8, two Forest Rangers, with the assistance of DEC Operations Northville sign shop staff Bailey and Edwards, installed a new Smokey Bear fire danger rating sign at the recently constructed Caroga Lake Volunteer Fire Company firehouse. Forest Rangers work closely with many local fire companies across the state, and while installing the sign were called upon to respond to a small brush fire. The Rangers and the fire company suppressed the fire quickly and returned to the fire house to complete the installation."

Around the State

Dickinson Hill: There were several in person and virtual events around the state that celebrated National Women's History Month, including a very successful one that honored Helen Ellett, an Observer at Dickinson Hill Fire Tower. The Friends of Grafton Lake State Park held an event last month (I apologize I did not know about it in time to get it in the newsletter. We did put it out on our Facebook page). They are now going to make it an annual event. From their newsletter - “One of the biggest events this past month was the **Helen Ellett Fire Tower Observer Chat and Hike to the Fire Tower**, held on March 14th, 2021 as part of Women’s History Month. Ellett was the second female fire tower observer in New York State and an observer at our Dickinson Fire Tower for 18 years between 1943-1965. The “Chat” in the morning was offered by **Linda Laveway**, a descendant of Hellen Ellet, with introduction by **Anne Kieley** from the Grafton Historical Society. We are now hoping to make this an annual hike and event! Keep in mind that you too can climb the fire tower and enjoy the view of the Rensselaer Plateau from there!” The FFLA will be going to the tower to take care of some graffiti again as soon as the weather allows. Would you like to lend a hand? If so, please let me know. If you would like to hear more about Helen, you can find copies of *I Remember When: Untold Stories of Helen Ellett* by Randy Kneer at several locations.

Poke O Moonshine: The Friends of Poke O Moonshine have hired a steward for 2021. Her name is Bianca Lynch and she tells us a bit about herself in their latest newsletter: “I am a Junior-standing student at SUNY Plattsburgh, studying to earn a degree in environmental science. Having grown up in Plattsburgh, I’ve had the opportunity to explore the Adirondacks and grow a great appreciation for nature. During the warmer months, I enjoy kayaking, hiking, gardening, and learning about fungi and plant species along the way. In the winter, I get my outdoor fix through snowshoeing and skiing. My additional interests and experience include sustainable farming; I spent a summer tending vegetables and flowers at Shady Grove Farm in Peru. I have always been drawn to the wonders of the natural world and am eager to share my knowledge on low-impact forest interactions to conserve the overall health of the environment. I am grateful to be part of community dedicated to preserving the history and integrity of Poke O Moonshine. I’ll be on the mountain Thursdays-Mondays from late May through Labor Day.”

College News: Last month you may recall that we wished retiring Forest Ranger Scott Vanlaer well, but he was not retired for long. Scott is the new Director at the Paul Smith’s Visitor Interpretive Center. We wish Scott well in his new endeavor: <https://www.adirondackexplorer.org/stories/scott-van-laers-career-moves-full-circle>

Meanwhile over at SUNY ESF they made the top of the list: <https://study.com/degrees/bachelors-degrees-in-forestry.html>

Around the Northeast

Last month I had the pleasure of listening to a live event that featured Jean and Hugh Joudry from VT. Jean and Hugh have been stewarding at the Stratton Mt Fire Tower there for over 50 years. What joy they have gotten from this job and what joy they have given hikers over the years. Many stories were shared during this wonderful presentation. Thanks to the Green Mt Club for sponsoring this. You can see the presentation here – Enjoy! <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BJ5JmhsZn84>

Follow up from Last Month

Thank you to all who sent in the identity of the people in the 1991 photo of the FFLA Northeastern Conference organized by then Chapter Director, Fred Knauf, and held at the Northeast Loggers Offices. The identities are as follows: Back Row, left to right: Mark Clark, Mark Haughwout, Chuck Helms, Front Row, left to right: Chris Hartz, Roy Schweiker, Henry Isenberg, Ellen Dill Isenberg, Steve Cummings, Bob Spear Fred Knauf, and Dave Quam. Larger image at <http://nysffa.org/conf/conf1991.html>



National Volunteer Week - April 18-24

Volunteers do not necessarily have the time, they just have the heart. At FFLA we want to say a big shout out of thanks to all of you have so generously volunteered of your time. While Volunteers are celebrated just this one week across our country, we celebrate and appreciate your important role every day! Just a few snapshots from our work:



Food for Thought

Several different items came across my desk this month, some quite controversial, some which may seem that they don't have anything to do with fire towers, and some which just make us think. In no particular order you may wish to check out the following articles.

In a powerfully done testimonial, PBS explores the Creek Fire that occurred last year. You will hear eye witness accounts, see amazing video clips, and also hear opinions on why this fire occurred and what can be done to prevent such fires in the future. <https://www.pbs.org/video/afterburn-the-creek-fire-debate-amll1f/>

In this article from the Smithsonian, Women Fire Tower Observers or Lookouts are featured. This is a well researched article and draws the conclusion that Observers/Lookouts are still a vital part of the circle of fire prevention/fire fighting. A quote from this article, "Even as technology threatens to take over the job, agencies that have conducted [years of research](#) have determined that, for now, a combination of planes and human observation is the most efficient and economical way to spot and fight wildfires. Planes can't really fly during lightning storms, and having aircraft circling hundreds of thousands of acres across the U.S., 24/7 isn't feasible. So trained, dedicated lookouts who can spot smoke or fire and record the location, size and characteristics using binoculars, maps, a compass and the Osborne Fire Finder, and quickly and calmly report those sightings to dispatchers are key in containing wildfires." <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/female-fire-lookouts-have-been-saving-wilderness-over-century-180977352/>

Closer to home is an article written by Poke O Moonshine Coordinator David Thomas-Train. As trail building has begun to move forward, David sites work done on several fire tower trails. Can this same level of sustainable trail building happen in other locations? <https://www.adirondackalmanack.com/2021/03/new-trails-aim-to-undo-mistakes-of-the-past.html>

Black Rock Forest was the focus of one of Fred Knauf's Throwback Thursday Facebook posts this month. It just so happens, we visited there recently. It is a lovely park, but the fire tower has been off limits for many years now. Additionally, this article throws a different light on the corporation in charge of Black Rock Forest. What do you think? <https://www.bloomberg.com/features/2020-nature-conservancy-carbon-offsets-trees>

This article discusses the High Peaks Strategic Planning Group, and their recommendations regarding visitor use experience there. There is also a similar group in the Catskills, the Catskills Strategic Planning Group. Fire Towers are one of the most significant attractions in both the Catskill and Adirondack Park and yet neither group has a fire tower representative. It would seem to me that if you want to have successful outcomes, you would want to have knowledgeable people at the table. What do you think? <https://www.adirondackalmanack.com/2021/03/hpag-report-the-visitor-experience.html>

And finally, some real food for thought as the number of people who are out recreating in the outdoors increases, will a permit system be required to hike to a fire tower? Bald Mountain Fire Tower, Overlook Mountain Fire Tower, Mount Beacon Fire Tower all have huge numbers of visitors and not enough parking spaces. In the High Peaks Region of the Adirondacks a new program is underway with a "reservation" system. Notice it is not called a permit system. How will it all unfold and will it be something we have to consider at fire towers in the future? <https://www.adirondackexplorer.org/stories/hiking-permit-system-set-for-popular-adirondack-trails-gateway>

This month Tom and I felt a bit more comfortable with traveling to do some fire tower inspections that we had not gotten to last year. While snow still covered many of the trails to the north, we headed south where the sun was warm and the ground was dry underfoot. I like to see what is happening at the fire towers first hand. Once we return, I try to reach out to the appropriate parties to discuss any issues we may have seen, and successes too! We were pleased to see the Stissing Fire Tower has very little graffiti and the Friends of Stissing Landmarks have really improved their trail markings. Jackie Jones was looking great until you climbed into the cab where we found many windows missing and a great deal of graffiti. Working with the Park, we are going to try to make repairs, particularly in light of all the work we did just a few years ago. We feel this is a perfect place for a volunteer steward program, are you interested in helping out? We visited the Nelson (Salt Hill) Fire Tower which lies on the ground, a sad reminder of the very worst of vandalism. This is really a great piece of State Forest, but nothing has been done in terms of marking the old Observer's Trail. It is my understanding that the DEC is hoping to sell/transfer it to the DEP. Roosa Gap has now had all of the communication equipment and buildings removed, now if we could only get that engineer's report done and paint over the graffiti, it could be officially reopened. Graham Fire Tower still has some great looking footings, but a lot of communications equipment. Repairs would likely only need to be lumber replacement. Lovely loop trails off the Long Path lead you right to the site, though they sure could use a few more markers. Black Rock Forest was noted above. Mount Nimham has more graffiti than I have ever seen, including the road surface, trees, rocks, and of course the fire tower. Mount Beacon comes in a close second for significant amount of graffiti on all surfaces. They need to look into the footings on this tower too. Sterling Forest was closed so we could not access the tower, but it looked like our work from a few years ago is holding up well, though the graffiti done to the Smokey Bear sign is disgusting.

Calendar

please note that all dates are subject to change due to changing Covid-19 guidelines and weather
* please check with either myself or the coordinators for confirmation*

Saturday April 24: Poke O Moonshine Trail Work Day on the Ranger Trail. Clean water bars, brush-in herd paths. 9:30AM at the parking lot one mile south of the campground. Mark Robinson and David Thomas-Train, coordinators

Saturday, May 8: Poke O Moonshine Plant and Wildflower Walk 9 AM - 12PM. Meet at the Ranger Trail parking lot just inside of the campground.. Bring water, lunch, and gear appropriate for 3 hours in the woods. Meet at the campground. Led by botanist Michael Burgess of SUNY Plattsburgh. To sign up, text 802-989-6134.

Tuesday, July 13, Wednesday July, 14; Thursday, August 5: Poke O Moonshine Trail Work Days on the Observer's Trail. clean water bars, brush-in herd paths, do minor rock work. 9:30AM at the Route 9 parking area 1 mile south of the campground. Call or email Mark Robinson, Trails Coordinator, at 518-578-1480 / [petson12996@yahoo.com](mailto:petsen12996@yahoo.com)

Saturday, May 1 and Sunday, May 2: I Love My Park Day – A great opportunity to showcase what you have done at your tower, and to include some recruitment for future members of your friends group, new stewards, donations, you name it! Events can be found here, though as of this writing I did not see any fire tower options currently scheduled - <https://www.ptny.org/events/i-love-my-park-day>

May 15 through the 23rd – Blue Mt Observer's cabin, various days. Contact lauriejrankin@gmail.com

Saturday, June 5: National Trails Day, though as of this writing no fire tower options listed

Saturday, June 12 or Sunday, June 13 – Lyon trail work – best weather day Contact lauriejrankin@gmail.com

Saturday, July 10 and Sunday, July 11: - Vanderwhacker cabin with Adirondack 46ers: <http://www.adk46er.org/trail-crew.html>

Saturday, July 24 and Sunday July 25: - Vanderwhacker cabin with Adirondack 46ers: <http://www.adk46er.org/trail-crew.html>

Saturday, July 24 and Sunday, July 25: Pillsbury Fire Tower work Contact lauriejrankin@gmail.com

Saturday, July 31 and Sunday, August 8-1: Poke O Moonshine Trail Work with Adirondack 46ers: <http://www.adk46er.org/trail-crew.html>

Saturday, August 7 and Sunday, August 8: Vanderwhacker cabin with 46ers: <http://www.adk46er.org/trail-crew.html>

Saturday, August 14 and Sunday, August 15: Pillsbury Fire Tower Work Contact lauriejrankin@gmail.com

Saturday, September 4: Lighting of the Fire Tower Event Statewide – check out our web page for the guidelines to participate in this event. It is not too early to begin your planning. Contact lauriejrankin@gmail.com

Saturday, September 18 or Sunday, September 19: Lyon trail work – best weather day Contact lauriejrankin@gmail.com

Oct dates tbd: Kane Observer's Cabin Contact lauriejrankin@gmail.com

Work Calendar can be found on our web page at <http://nysffa.org/calendar.html>

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