



Forest Fire Lookout Association New York State Chapter June 2021

Some wonderful, even astronomical events happened this month in New York. First, we had our monthly photo contest on our very active Facebook page (we began the year with 755 members and now have 861 – some of this is related to new Facebook settings). One of our relatively new volunteers, Jessica, submitted a photo her brother took of Hadley Mountain Fire Tower with a wonderful, starry backdrop and that was our contest winner for June! This photo seen here also graces the cover of our Facebook page through July 15th. Thanks for submitting this Jessica, and thanks to your brother, CT Ware, for being in the right place at the right time! We appreciate all of the people who participate in this monthly contest.



Then we had a partial annular eclipse on the 9th, which was visible in most NYS locations. We set out at 5 AM to get a glimpse of it from a nearby fire tower, but some recent road closures due to flash flooding had us taking a new route to our destination, Utsayantha. On one road, we could see the fire tower and the sun pillar up ahead, so we decided to stop right there and take in the view. It was wonderful to see, a lovely sunrise, a great sun pillar and the eclipse (viewed through our eclipse glasses). Later that morning on our Facebook page, we were fortunate to see some photos from other locations. This one from Julian Diamond taken of the Stissing Fire Tower captured our eye! Shared with permission.



The real stars of the show in June of 2021 are the volunteers who have stepped forward and been very busy this past month.

Around the State

Blue: The work concluded on the exterior of the Blue Mountain Lake Observers cabin that we reported on last month. A great weather window, fabulous volunteers and a wonderful NYSDEC liaison to work with, Nick, made the work go very well. 5 days, including some with surprises, such as floor joists that needed replacing, were all made easier by Nick, Adam, John, Allison, RJ, Michelle, Brenda, Jessica, Greg, Michele, Yana, Margaret and Susan. Plans have already been made for the interior work on the cabin to occur September 18 through the 23rd.



Jackie Jones: It is always sad to see graffiti in or on a fire tower, perhaps more so after you know many volunteers have given of their time to repair and restore that fire tower. Such is the case with Jackie Jones, a tower that the FFLA worked on extensively in 2018. The graffiti was extensive, but that did not stop volunteers Matt, Linda, and Tom C from getting the job done on the 21st.



Photo credits – Linda Kukol



Swede: We got a last minute request from Warren County asking us if we could help with three items. We were able to find a group of those wonderful star volunteers and spent two days with pretty nice weather working on a wet section of trail. This section of trail was in a small depression, but the



depression was filled with water, mud, and logging slash. It was a daunting task, but one which volunteers Jake, Dan, Steve, Ron, Barb, Dave, and myself were able to take care of in just two days! Check out the before and after pictures. We are awaiting word on the other two items from Warren County. When we hear more, we will be asking for assistance. Meanwhile, the trail remains closed.

Poke O Moonshine: We got in a visit to Poke O, an annual trip where we get to see the maiden hair ferns, the lady slippers and this year a bonus – we met Bianca Lynch, the Steward for this season. It was a joy to meet this young woman who is representing fire towers and our future so well! See more about her in our April 2021 newsletter. Old newsletters can be found at <http://nysffla.org/news.html>

St. Regis: The Friends Group here is happy to report they have a summit steward this year, Ethan Johnsen who will be on duty three days a week. He is an employee of the Adirondack Watershed Institute at Paul Smiths College. Ethan will share his time between boat launch stewarding and fire tower stewarding. His schedule can be found at <http://www.friendsofstregis.org/calendar>. Ethan posts regularly on his time at the summit.

Hurricane: This summer will see some differences on Hurricane Mountain. If you haven't been up to the fire tower in a while, last summer, the Friends of Hurricane installed panoramic photos in the cab identifying all the major mountains and landscape features that you see as you look out. This summer, the Friends will install a new map table in the cab similar to the one the observer used.

Stillwater: What a fun day National Trails Day was this year! The FFLA is responsible for the Stillwater Fire Tower, trail, and stewardship program. We decided to make a day of it. We held two different orientation sessions for volunteer stewards, one at 10 and one at 2, and in between we went up to the tower and back, doing trail work as we went. Uniforms were handed out, suggestions were exchanged, views were enjoyed! It was a great day with Jeremy, Harry, Shane, Terri, Henry, Bill, Jeff, Andrea, Tom, Kathi, and Daryl.

Mount Beacon: In preparation for the upcoming 90th anniversary of the construction of the Mt. Beacon Fire Tower, members of the Mt. Beacon Fire Tower Committee and the Hudson Valley Four Wheelers Association volunteered their time and talents to start cleaning up the horrendous graffiti problem that exists on the Fire Tower. They also did much needed repairs to the fire tower footings and even replaced the rope on the flag pole allowing Old Glory to fly again over the south peak of Mt. Beacon. Future work on the fire tower will take place sometime over the next few weeks. Thank you to all who helped!



Balsam Lake Mountain: An orientation for new stewards was held on the mountain on May 15th with 6 new volunteers stepping up to spend time at the tower greeting and educating the hiking public. We thank Ginger, Chuck, Beth, Mike, Margaret, and Jim for taking on this new task! We also did some painting and cleaning.

Lyon Mt Trail Work: Sometimes the star of the show and fire towers do not seem to go together, but in this case, I think they do. On Saturday, the 12th we (Tom and I) did trail work on Lyon Mt. This is a lengthy section of trail (4.3 mi) that goes through several forest types and often holds snow late into the year. Thus we plan our trip a bit later than some others and in addition to no snow, we are fortunate to see a wonderful display of lady slippers. I think they exist there because the fire tower and its Observers took good care of the surrounding forest for years!

Bramley: The Friends of Bramley Mt. fire tower members Rick and Wendell placed a new sign near the summit view point. The sign provides information about the project that is underway to return the fire tower to the summit and about how one can donate to that project. Thanks for the great design and the option to pay at the summit with a smart phone! Don't forget you can purchase T-shirts and find directions to the trail at <https://bramleymountainfiretower.org/>



Dickinson Hill: From the Friends of Grafton Lakes State Park comes this invitation - Keep a look out for the Park's 50th Anniversary Events that will be occurring throughout the year. The biggest event will occur on July 1st, when our gate fees will be reduced to what they were at the park's opening— **Just 25 cents!** Some of the events that day will include an artist's luncheon at Noon; an afternoon hike to the Dickinson Fire Tower; and an evening talk by Linda Laveway, the granddaughter of Helen Ellet, who was an observer at the tower between 1943-1965. * In following state guidelines, the Park has also reduced some of its COVID-19 restrictions. The Park is still operating at "reduced capacity," but more than the 50% from last year. Masks are no longer required outdoors so long as people maintain social distancing. (Masks are still required in the bathrooms and the Welcome Center for everyone.)

Belfry: I was notified of a problem with graffiti at Belfry fire tower. This short, easy climb is one that attracts many young visitors and many older visitors who can no longer do a long or steep hike. It is important to me that young visitors do not see graffiti as acceptable in a fire tower cab. I reached out to the NYSDEC about this and completed the paperwork necessary to make a trip and cover over the graffiti. Tom joined me as well and when we arrived, we found the problem more than we had anticipated. We did what we could, made our report and with permission from DEC, we made plans to purchase some more paint and made a second trip up. Two times is the charm and all is well now.

Bald Mt: We had a few moments to spare one morning recently and got in a trip to Bald Mt Fire Tower. This one never disappoints and by going in the early morning hours we saw few other visitors. A group of DEC representatives and local officials met in May to discuss the possibilities surrounding construction of a secondary trail head for Bald Mt Fire Tower. This project is being discussed following last years difficulty with parking alongside crowded roadways that created unsafe conditions. You can read the entire article on pages 4 and 24 in this link: <https://www.adirondackexpress.com/express-3d-may-14-2021/>

Cathead: From the Adirondack Explorer, End of legislative session: "We did not see a constitutional amendment get first passage for [Hamilton County to gets its emergency communications tower on Cathead Mountain](#), among other proposals still waiting in the wings".

Tailgating then and now: The FFLA is so very appreciative of all of the work that these around the state stories represent and all of the volunteer hours that go into these work projects. We do our best to provide a few refreshments after a project. A beverage of the correct temperature, hot on a cool day and ice cold on a hot day seems like the least we can do for our stars, the volunteer. In addition to the beverage we try to offer a salty snack or an item for one's sweet tooth as a small way of saying thanks. This practice is commonly known in 2021 as tailgating. Ideally, one has a pickup truck or two parked side by side and with the tailgate down, we lay out our spread of beverages and snacks. If the volunteers want to have a seat, the tailgate works great for that too! Sometimes visitors even come by during a tailgate and offer a donation as a way of their thanks for the work they saw occurring.

I have an early childhood memory of my Dad out working with other Observers one day – While their work in looking for smoke may have seemed isolated and lonely, Observers often spent time working with one another and often socialized with one another as well. They often helped one another out with road work or cabin building or trail improvement projects – The day of my memory may well have been one where Dad was out helping another Observer. I recall he was late coming home. My Mom mentioned that he was “in the dog house”. We had a dog and that dog's house was very small. I was very worried about the fate that awaited Dad when he finally arrived home. I met him at the door before my Mom did and told him she was going to send him to the dog house to sleep. I recall him thanking me for the warning and the smile on his face. I wonder if they had been tailgating – 😊

Partnerships

Paul Smiths VIC: At the Paul Smiths Visitor Interpretive Center, new Director, Scott van Laer has been in discussion with Friends of St. Regis Education Director about how the two groups can partner together. Currently, the original crank phone from the St. Regis Fire Tower is on display along with the map table and alidade from the former DeBar fire tower. St. Regis fire tower can be seen from several locations around the campus of the VIC. Stop by and visit, they are open 9 to 5 daily through September 6th.

Hurricane: The Friends of Hurricane have entered into an agreement with the Adirondack Mountain Club (ADK) and their summit steward program. The ADK will provide a mix of volunteers and paid stewards to help educate hikers and protect the Adirondack environment as they enjoy all that Hurricane has to offer.

Mount Beacon: Thanks are also in order to Beacon's Brett's True Value Hardware for donating the material that was needed for the project noted above. Thank you!

National

<https://www.hcn.org/articles/drought-a-parched-west-heads-into-fire-season> U.S. Interior Secretary Deb Haaland and Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack told reporters on May 13, 2021, that federal fire officials had [warned them to prepare for an extremely active fire year](#). “We used to call it fire season, but wildland fires now extend throughout the entire year, burning hotter and growing more catastrophic in drier conditions due to climate change,” [Vilsack said](#).

Here is a great story by our friends at Filson: <https://www.filson.com/blog/how-to/how-to-buy-a-fire-lookout-tower/>

I like to read provocative articles. Sometimes I see things from a perspective I had not previously considered. What do you think? <https://inthesetimes.com/article/wildfire-fuels-reduction-wildlife-habitat-wildland-urban-interface>

Kempshall: From our friend John Sasso is an interesting article he did. *Historical Profile - Kempshall Mountain - Beyond the Fire Tower*. A [link](#) to his paper on the history surrounding Kempshall Mountain of Long Lake, beyond fire observation. Much thanks to Long Lake author & historian Gail Huntley for the off-line discussions regarding research and doing the first review of it!

Light up the Night – time to get the planning underway!

What's this you say? It is the perfect local event! This event is truly a great opportunity for you to promote fire towers and their special connection to the community. This event is the brain child of Doug Hamilton of the Red Hill Fire Tower Committee. The idea is to light the fire tower with a high powered light on a specific date, put lots of press releases in the local paper about the time when this would occur and invite people to go to locations around the community where they could look up, see the light on the horizon and remember that there was a fire tower there watching over and protecting the community and surrounding forest. This year the event will occur on Saturday, September 4th from 9:00pm to 9:30 pm. Rain date will be Sunday, September 5th at the same times.

This event will occur under the following guidelines:

- a - Remember this is NOT a hiking event. It is a fire tower promotional event.
 - b - Please reach out to your local newspapers with locations that the fire tower will be visible from. Encourage people to drive or hike to those locations while maintaining social distancing and look up at 9:00pm to see that strange light shining!
 - c - Choose a fire tower you would like to light and coordinate with the local group there. If you are in doubt about who to contact, let me know and I will direct you to the right person(s).
 - d - Let me know of your participation so it can be publicized.
 - e - Choose your Illuminator and the type of light you will use.
 - f - Choose one or two people who will accompany the Illuminator for safety purposes and be certain the group is willing to either practice social distancing, belongs to the same family group, or wears a mask when not 6 feet apart for the hike* and the event. Additionally, please make sure everyone has the proper gear for a night hike including enough head lamps.
 - g - Please light the lamp for the specified period of 9:00 pm to 9:30 pm.
 - h - Due to Covid19, we recommend that all wear a mask while on the tower, practice social distancing and sanitize well before and after being on the tower.* You can light the light from the upper landing if you feel more comfortable doing so.
 - i - Deadline for participation is 10 days prior to the event - August 24th - so that press releases can go out. No tower will be accepted for participation after August 24th.
 - j - Please report back to me after the lighting event so we know that all are off the mountain safely and please consider sharing pictures with us too!
- *Covid guidelines subject to change.

Calendar

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. 9:30 AM at the Route 9 parking area 1 mile south of the campground. Call or email Mark Robinson, Trails Coordinator, at 518-578-1480 / peterston12996@yahoo.com

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

Saturday, September 4: Lighting of the Fire Tower Event Statewide – check 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

September 18 through September 23: Blue Mountain Observer's Cabin. Contact
lauriejrankin@gmail.com

This is a photo of Utsayantha that is a new favorite of mine – the tower is surrounded by so many communication towers that it is often difficult to get a photo of it. On this foggy morning, a 3 year old had been promised a trip to the fire tower, so grandpa went and kept his promise despite the fog. She was thrilled! So when you find a day that is not quite as starry as you may like, remember the fog offers hope!

Laurie Rankin, Director
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