



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



Just as in the past when Observers returned to active duty on their fire towers, late spring has been a very busy time. We have seen numerous projects getting underway or completed, many volunteers stepping forward, roads reopened for access to fire towers trails, and more. Lots to read about in this newsletter for sure!



We will start with a bit of follow up that spontaneously occurred following last month's Facebook calendar winning photo that appeared in the newsletter. While we had asked for photos featuring springs where water was found to quench the thirst of the Observer, the winning photo also happened to include a dog quenching her thirst. Thus this month's photo contest was a photo of a dog at or on a fire tower and it was a popular theme! We got many great entries, the winning entry pictured above, a photo submitted by Lori Ann, one of our wonderful volunteers, of her friend's dog, Merle, at Lyon Mt. Fire Tower. Congrats to Lori Ann, whose photo also graces our Facebook page this month! Additionally, I got some great feedback from others about their dogs. One of those was this photo of Rick Miller and his dog Whiskey, who came to Kane each day when Rick was the Observer there. As a young pup, Rick said Whiskey got used to going up the fire tower and quickly became comfortable with the climb up and down.

Graffiti Erasers? Graffiti Killers? Graffiti Fighters? What is the best term we can use to describe all of the volunteer hours that go into defeating the graffiti criminals? Last month several trips were made to erase and wipe out the graffiti that criminals have foisted upon our historic structures. Dickinson Hill, Ferncliff, and Kane have all had a clean coat of paint. Thank you Tom! Additionally, volunteers Tom and Linda along with Matt, Director of Special Projects will be ridding Jackie Jones of its nasty coat of graffiti this coming Friday, and replacing some windows that were broken out. At Blue, several volunteers; Allison, Adam, John, Michelle, and Jessica tried using yet another product to remove graffiti from some of the summit rocks. Their efforts were great, but the graffiti remains. And Bill Volkman of the Mount Nimham fire tower group told me of their efforts to rid the tower, trees, road, and rocks of graffiti - "I have another team of people who I set up with a graffiti remover product and a pressure washer system that is on the back of a pick-up truck. A portable pump which they use to remove graffiti from the rocks. I believe they did their work to remove the graffiti from the rocks just a few days ago because they are asking me to order more of the graffiti remover product" This heroic effort is after trying numerous other options. We need prosecution of these vandals and we need to promote the fines and community service that could be levied to help prevent more of this!

Roads Reopened

4-30-21 NYSDEC Bulletin Perkins Clearing and Speculator: Perkins Clearing Road is open as of May 7. Jessup River Road is not open and the gate on Old Military Road will remain closed, therefore the access to Pillsbury Mountain Trailhead and West Canada Wilderness is also unavailable.

5-7-21 NYSDEC Bulletin: West Canada Lakes Wilderness: Cedar River Flow Road is open to the Wakely Dam.

Still Closed

Swede Mt Fire Tower: This fire tower and trail are not yet open! I have heard from several people that they are using this trail. It remains closed as does the fire tower. Please do not trespass! You will ruin this opportunity to see the fire tower and trail open to all.

Around the State

Mt Adams: Spring work day was May 16th. Thanks to Jack and John for checking on things.

Hurricane: The crew from the Friends of Hurricane Mountain Fire Tower have been busy doing trail work on all three trails and checking out the spring wildflowers along the way! Want to join them some time? Just reach out at their web page: <https://www.hurricanefiretower.org/>

Poke O Trail Work: On Saturday, April 24th, several volunteers helped to clear water bars on the Ranger Trail. Great weather with few bugs made for an enjoyable day. Thanks to everyone who helped out!

Hadley Trail Work: On Saturday, May 15th a small but hearty trail crew did work on the Hadley Mt. Fire Tower trail. There are some water bars that often need sprucing up and the folks who turned out cleaned and tidied them and more! Thank you for your work!

Hadley Mt Vandalism: On April 27th the Hadley Mt Fire Tower Committee posted the following: *We usually lock the fire tower in the off season, because it gets an inordinate amount of vandalism in late fall and early spring. Sometime in the past couple of weeks someone either cut the lock or pried the latch apart, so the tower is now open. For some reason new hikers think they need to "show the world" what a great thing they just did, by carving their initials somewhere. The furring strips that hold the windows in place, are pretty much filled up with writing, so now they have started to scratch their initials/comments into the plexiglass. The windows were replaced by DEC around 8 years ago. They were very clear, when new. I would say that now they are bad enough that you probably don't want to take a picture through them. One of them, to the north has hinges and opens (though it needs some TLC). I was talking to some of my friends and they thought the tower would be better with no windows. A compromise might be to leave the ones in, that face west (for the prevailing wind). I'm just curious what other hiker's opinions are. Obviously leaving it locked in the off season isn't really working that well. It's still getting scratched and many people are disappointed that it is not open. If you see something, please say something. Prosecuting these individuals to the fullest extent of the law and publishing their punishment is in order!*



Blue Mt Fire Tower: As I type this we are in the middle of a week long work project at Blue Mt Observer's cabin. If you recall, in 2019 (pre-covid) we did significant work on the Blue Mt. Lake Fire Tower. This work occurred under the direction of our NYSDEC liaison, Nick Addison, whom we work with for 5 fire towers in Hamilton County. Nick wanted to complete the work on the tower (we did), restore the Observer's cabin (we are working on it), put up a new kiosk and improve the hiking trail to the tower. This is obviously a large multi year project, but take it on



the FFLA volunteers have! On Saturday, May 15th a crew of 5 went to the summit with Nick and removed old siding on the cabin and installed new. Over the course of the coming week, many volunteers have stepped forward to complete this work if possible. A great weather window has also been helpful! Many thanks to all of the volunteers! Photos courtesy of Adam Nichols and John Sasso.

NYS DEC Stewardship award announced on April 19th. Congratulations to all of the Catskill Fire Tower Project volunteers who have manned the towers for more than 20 years, done maintenance and been the backbone of this project. All of this was done on a volunteer basis for 5 separate fire towers; Hunter, Balsam Lake, Red Hill, Mount Tremper, and Overlook. Between these 5 towers there are well over 10,000 visitors per year and 100 volunteers who greet them! Congratulations to each of you who have volunteered over the last 24 years!

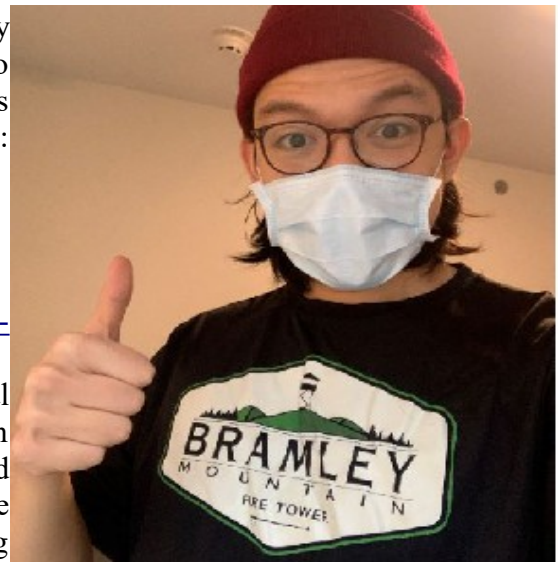


<https://content.govdelivery.com/accounts/NYSDEC/bulletins/2cddf3d>

Cornell Hill Fire tower: Thanks to a dedicated group of fire tower volunteers, the Cornell Hill Fire Tower at Camp Saratoga tower will be ready for visitors on several weekends, June 19th and 20th, July 17th and 18th, August 21st and 22nd, September 18th and 19th, and October 2nd, 3rd, 16th and 17th. Remember, if the weather is threatening, the tower will be closed. If you would like to help out, please stop by on a weekend when they are open and find out how to get involved!

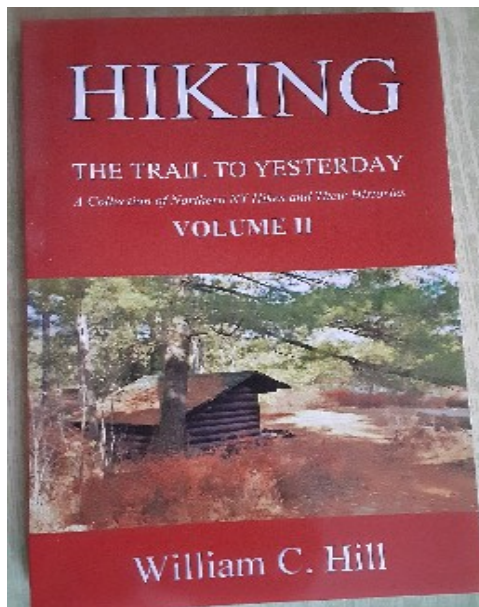
Sterling Forest: Susan from the Friends of Sterling Forest asked me to please include a "call for volunteers" in this newsletter. The decision has been made to plan to be open Saturdays and Sundays, Memorial Day weekend through Columbus Day weekend from 11 AM-3 PM. This would be a great way to give back, to interact with other hikers and to help out the Sterling Fire Tower! Please contact sterlingfiretower01@gmail.com

Bramley Mt Fire Tower: The Friends of Bramley Mountain are now offering a T-shirt to help raise funds to rebuild the tower. I love the design and the fact that it was done pro bono! Check them out on their web page: <https://bramleymountainfiretower.org/>



Rock Rift: Remember this newspaper article? https://www.thedailystar.com/news/local_news/tompkins-gets-4k-grant-to-repair-historic-fire-tower/article_c63bda2a-3baa-5b93-aa1d-99482cdbl7da.html

The Town of Tompkins took quick action, utilizing local Engineer Jim Forbes to visit the fire tower and complete an engineering inspection. Jim's inspection was thorough and thoughtful. Jim made several recommendations and the Town now has a pretty firm figure to work with going forward in terms of cost.



Hiking the Trail to Yesterday Volume II: Our FFLA member and friend Bill Hill has released a second volume of his popular Hiking the Trail to Yesterday, a Collection of Northern NY Hikes and Their Histories. In this volume you will find a couple of fire tower chapters. Thanks for the shout outs Bill!

Getting the next generation involved: David Thomas-Train from the Friends of Poke O Moonshine shared this Youtube video with me, produced by SUNY Plattsburgh students. While not entirely accurate, it is wonderful to see the next generation take an interest in our historical fire towers. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BUhZX_7mIIQ

Around the Northeast

New Hampshire: Our northeastern neighbors have a number of fire towers in their state. Visit 5 out of the ones listed in this brochure and you can receive a patch <https://www.nh.gov/nhdfl/documents/tower-request-brochure.pdf>

Vermont: Our closer northeastern neighbors have a wealth of fire towers too! The Green Mt. Club offers a guidebook to assist you in visiting their towers: <https://store.greenmountainclub.org/products/360-degrees-a-guide-to-vermonts-fire-and-observation-towers> Another follow up from April was the news from our Vermont Director, Peter Hayes, that Jeanne and Hugh are going to be back at Stratton Fire Tower for the 2021 season!

Maine: If you are a social media follower, I strongly encourage you to follow the Forest Fire Lookout Association Maine Chapter page. They have some wonderful historical posts, old photos, and new tower updates there.

Massachusetts: An FFLA Member who loves fire towers and often comes to NY and helps with projects and stewarding tells the story of how he initially got involved and became hooked on fire towers. Love this article Jack! <https://www.newsweek.com/playing-firewatch-changed-my-life-1578396>

National News

The Big Screen: A fire tower plays a pivotal role in this upcoming movie starring Angelina Jolie. Check out the trailer here and try to see the movie – it will be interesting to see how fire towers are depicted. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iV_ISlCc64k

We often talk about fire management and how policies have changed over the years. This article takes us back many, many years ago. <https://www.kuer.org/health-science-environment/2021-04-15/new-study-finds-indigenous-people-used-fire-to-manage-utah-forests-over-1000-years-ago>

Harry Peck from Stillwater fire tower shared this extreme fire tower adventure with me: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=WT2LE0OXLZY> Whatever you do, don't try this at home – i.e. in NYS! Please! But it was interesting none the less and other fire tower adventures can be seen on the side bar. Here is one such video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XgrmL8WyUQM>

From the NY Times is an article about the busy early spring fire season already, even with snow still visible: <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/04/30/us/wildfires-fire.html>

Partnerships: Sometimes we simply cannot do it all. Sometimes we have the opportunity to think outside the box and partner with others that may not seem obvious. The photo contest that ended up including a dog got me thinking of a favorite childhood memory. Please forgive me if I repeat myself here. As a child growing up we made frequent visits to Balsam Lake Mt. Fire Tower where my Dad was the Observer from 1958 to 1972. We all know that children are always anxious to arrive at their destination. My parents had a “half way point” along the trail they called elephant head rock. This rock had a large head and a long trunk protruding from it. But for me, that half way point was not really that special. What told me we were nearly there was when I heard the “tower bird”. Later in life I learned that the song was that of the white-throated sparrow who inhabited the boreal forest that surrounded the fire tower. Hearing “old sam peabody, peabody, peabody” meant we were about to arrive! Now I think of that song and I think could we partner with the Audubon Society on a fire tower project? I have heard that the local Audubon Chapter is thinking that the Bramley Mt. Fire Tower will be a great place to count raptors from. Would they be a great partner on the project? I am thinking the answer is yes. Could we partner with a native plant society too? Or a watershed group? Think outside the box and think locally for the partners that can help your Fire Tower group. Reach out to them and see what can happen!

Former Fire Tower Sites: We found a day to do a bit of touring to some old fire tower sites. We enjoyed a nice hike to the former Moose River fire tower and on our way home we stopped to see the old Brookfield site. The Moose River trail is certainly in need of some maintenance. I will be reaching out to the NYSDEC to see if we could volunteer for a day of work there. Please think about joining us and bringing some lopers! Thanks for considering.

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*

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

Saturday, June 5: National Trails Day Orientation for Stillwater Fire Tower Volunteers at 10am or 2pm. Contact lauriejrankin@gmail.com if interested in volunteering at the fire tower this year

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

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 / 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

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

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

Laurie Rankin, Director
New York State Chapter
Forest Fire Lookout Association
www.nysffla.org