



**Forest Fire Lookout Association
New York State Chapter
February 2022**



This month's photo contest winner is Bill Hill with this photo of Mt. Arab that he took in February of 2021. It was a narrow victory with lots of great photos entered into the contest from our Facebook friends. Congratulations to Bill for the win!

Follow Up: Last month, I had shared my concerns regarding the recommendations of the Catskill Advisory Group and the NYSDEC to hold a new Catskill Fire Tower Challenge without providing an investment in the facilities, trails and parking lots. I had just 2 comments, one from SS who said "It's more of a challenge to the towers than to the hikers!" and from AR "Your comments were very enlightening." We do hope there will be no ill effects to the facilities and parking areas from this new challenge.

We usually talk about centennial towers at the beginning of each year. Many among the tower inventory of New York State have already reached their 100th birthday and continue to stand tall! If I am reading the history correctly, we have only one tower celebrating a centennial this year, Goodnow Fire Tower in Newcomb! With your help, Goodnow is getting a facelift this year. That would be a perfect birthday gift! If you can help, it would be appreciated. <https://www.esf.edu/newcomb/firetower>.

The other historical and very important occurrence in 1922 was that standard observer's cabin plans were adopted. Prior to this time, observers had to make do with the natural materials they had, building lean-tos, rock shelters, some nice cabins, and some tar-paper shacks. With the advent of this regulation to provide suitable quarters for the observers several new cabins were built. The buildings were to be 12' x 16' with a roof and siding made of asphalt shingles. New cabins were erected at DeBar, Whiteface, Lyon, Poke-Moonshine and Adams. Cabins at Azure, Hurricane and Loon Lake were repaired and put in first-class shape. Pictured are Poke-O, Adams, and Lyon.

The observer was expected to see that his "cabin was kept at all times in a neat and clean condition. Whenever the building needs paint or staining the observer shall notify his District Ranger to that effect. The ground around the cabin should also be kept neat and clean, garbage and other refuse should be buried in order that the cabin as a whole may be clean and attractive."



Around the State

I had the pleasure of meeting the new Executive Director of AARCH, Erin Tobin via a Zoom call this month. Erin has some large shoes to fill with the departure of Steve Engelhart. Erin has just as much enthusiasm for fire towers as Steve did and she promptly invited us to co-sponsor a fire tower presentation. We were honored to be asked and thank Erin for the opportunity. Long time friend of Fire Towers and Chair of the Friends of Poke O Moonshine, David-Thomas Train, provided information on the history of fire towers in NYS and Poke O Moonshine in particular. There were some technical challenges, but David persevered through them. You can listen to a recording of the event here: <https://youtu.be/oc5wUogEXlc>.

The Catskill Mountain Club recently posted about a series of podcasts entitled Views from the Watershed. <https://www.walkingthewatershed.com/podcasttour/listen.html> I would like to call your attention to number 9, 'A Seat at the Table'. It is an interesting and heartfelt story about how to work together for the greater good. NYC DEP is currently involved in 2 fire tower projects to some degree. The Rock Rift Fire Tower trail goes through NYC DEP lands and the trailheads utilize their parking areas. The Bramley Mt. Fire Tower proposal will be to have a fire tower on NYC DEP lands, reached by 2 different loop trails on their lands. This podcast will help you get a better idea of how these opportunities for fire towers happened. It is worth the listen. We sincerely appreciate the support of the NYC DEP for these tower projects.

An interesting little clip came across my desk with a real time look at the Whiteface Fire Tower at the one minute mark: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IsZhmNPP_7s

Grafton Lakes State Park Visitors Center will be hosting a discussion with the granddaughter of Dickinson Hill Fire Tower Observer, Helen Ellett on March 5th at 10:00am. This will be an excellent opportunity to hear first hand memories of life at the fire tower and about Helen herself. We are very appreciative of the support for fire towers from this park, where you can visit the new tower at the Visitor Center playground and the Dickinson Hill fire tower before and after this discussion!

Hadley Mt. Fire Tower Committee is still seeking a Steward for the summer of 2022. "Have you ever wanted to work on top of a mountain top? The Hadley Mountain Fire Tower Committee is looking for our next summer steward. The position will be for a period of ten weeks, beginning in June and ending in August. The Tower Steward serves as an environmental educator as well as environmental caretaker for the natural mountain top, the access trail and the physical structures on the summit. For more information, email hadleymtfiretowercommittee@gmail.com". This group also has 2 scheduled hikes coming up this spring. On May 7th, they will hold their annual Wildflower Hike and on May 14th they will do Spring Trail Work. For more information, please visit their web page: <http://www.hadleymtfiretower.org/events-newsletters>

We will be doing website updates over the course of the next few weeks. Tom, our webmaster, is working on a new front page, hoping to make navigation easier. We will be making some corrections, and adding some new items. Thanks to Tom for all of his efforts in accomplishing this! If you have something you think should be added to the website, please let us know. <http://nysffla.org>

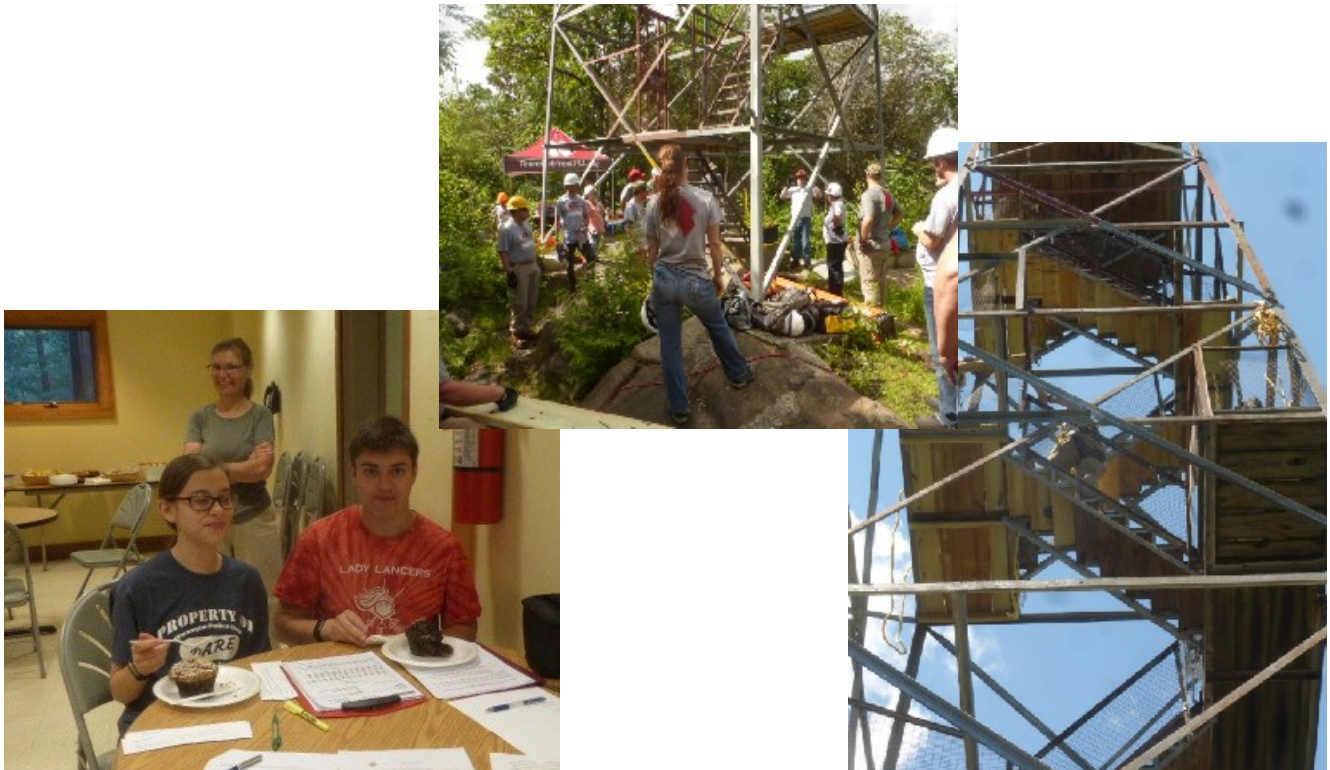
Another FFLA Affiliate

It is with great pleasure that we welcome The Friends of Sterling Forest as a new affiliate! My first “assignment” as the State Director was to work with the Park at Sterling Forest to restore the fire tower. I was welcomed by then Park Manager, Jeff Hutchison, but also by the Friends of Sterling Forest. This energetic group works within the Park on numerous projects and also leads hikes to the different areas of the Park. <https://friendsofsterlingforest.org>

As Park Manager, Jeff and the FFLA began to develop a work plan alongside the Friends group, we had 3 main goals in mind. We wanted to restore the historic structure so that it could remain part of the park landscape, to restore the fire tower so that it could be utilized for fire management and to begin a fire tower steward program. The Friends were thinking of ways to accomplish the goals, as well as to enhance the work and encourage local interest. Beginning in the Fall of 2015 we held the first of many work days at the fire tower. The Friends hosted a Slide Show presentation done by the FFLA, a Forest Walk to the fire tower, and more. As the word spread, we were joined by Friends of Sterling Forest volunteers, Team Rubicon, Share with a Teen and NYNJTC volunteers. All together we held 7 work dates, 39 different individuals assisted, and FSF was awarded an FFLA grant to assist in the restoration work. All of our goals were accomplished except for the steward program.

Stepping forward from the Friends of Sterling Forest was Susan Serico to develop and organize the Steward Program. Susan had experience with this from her work at Mt. Tremper in the Catskills and it did not take her long to have everything ready to go. In the Spring of 2018 she began recruiting for volunteers and this successful program continues today. Thank you to Susan and all of her work and to all of the volunteers who turn out to steward!

In addition to everything noted above, the Friends of Sterling Forest continue to maintain the fire tower, obtaining a grant for new windows in 2019. Thank you Friends of Sterling Forest for your continued work and for becoming an affiliate!



Since the January newsletter I have been very busy meeting with numerous entities in planning for 2022. It is always interesting, fun, and scary to develop relationships with the “owners” of fire towers. Most of the time we have the same goal in mind; preserving a fire tower through a restoration project, engaging in maintenance work, developing and supporting related structures like observer's cabins, privies, parking lots, and kiosks, and providing educational stewardship programs. These meetings are very productive and help us to set up an annual work schedule for projects.

At one of those meetings, I found out that our liason, Nick Addison, was leaving for another job opportunity. Many of you that are veteran volunteers know that Nick has been very, very helpful with our work at Blue and Pillsbury. Nick made sure we had all of the materials we needed, had a clear work plan, and in many cases worked right alongside us. And perhaps most of all - he really appreciated every moment of our volunteer time and efforts and he told you so! Through our Facebook page, I asked our veteran volunteers if they wanted to send a word of good luck to Nick. I put together their posts and sent them on to Nick.

In return, Nick says *“The partnerships I’ve formed with volunteers over my 5-years here is one of the reasons why this position has been so amazing. It is partly because of your dedication, selfless volunteerism, and passion for the Adirondack Park that I feel I’ve been successful in managing my units and their many assets—as you know, many of the projects wouldn’t be successful without your help.”* We will certainly miss you Nick and thank him for all of his support and efforts to save fire towers and Observer's cabins! Here's Nick at Blue, hard at work right alongside our FFLA volunteers!

We will be hoping for a great person to step into Nick's shoes in the future. In the meantime, a colleague of Nick's, Jon DeSantis, will be filling in the gaps. Jon has been a great liason with the Kane Mt. Fire tower and he worked alongside us on the Observer's Cabin there. We look forward to accomplishing a great deal in 2022 with his assistance.

At other meetings, more work plans were developed and more support was given for fire towers. We appreciate the support that we have gotten from NYS DEC. Stay tuned here for what we hope will be an announcement as soon as it is finalized.



As we celebrate the centennial of Goodnow Fire Tower, I thought we might wander back to the Observers who served there. An excerpt from *Adirondack Fire Towers Their History and Lore The Northern Districts*, by Marty Podskoch, tells us of the work of Observers on Goodnow and life on the mountain top. George Shaughnessy of Newcomb got the Observer's job in 1930 and related the following in an interview *"I walked the route to work each day. I had to be in the tower at 8:00 depending on the fog and other weather conditions. When the woods were dry, I stayed till dark – but it'd have to be damned awful dry for that! The trail to the tower went through the CCC camp. I broke the record for descending. Did it in eleven minutes clocked with the ranger's watch – not mine! After we built handmade railings up the trail, I managed to descend in seven minutes. I'd done it so much, I knew every step and rock. My feet were as swift as a deer and I used my hands and arms like a chimpanzee!"*

"First thing I had to do each morning was to put up the American flag and then call the forest ranger to report in. Then I would go for a pail of water down at the spring. I'll never forget one particular morning. Because it was so warm and muggy, all I was sporting was my underpants. I heard this rustling in the bushes, Jeez, the wind wasn't blowing. Then I saw a black form right beside me. The bear went to the spring; Old George went back up the mountain without the water."

If I saw smoke, I'd call the ranger. I had a big brown map right in front of me. It had a pointer on it. You put that pointer about as exact as you could where the smoke was. If it was behind a mountain it'd be impossible to tell, but you could estimate its location. There was a telephone in the tower. I'd sit right there and look out all day long."

Marty also interviewed Mary Hall Yandon, whose husband Lilbern replaced George as the Observer at Newcomb. *"Sometimes I went and stayed with him in the cabin. The cabin had a small wood stove. I remember it took a long time to boil the potatoes. I think it was because of the elevation. In the summer there was too much heat in the cabin with the wood stove going. I never baked because the stove did not have an oven. One time the metal chimney of the stove fell down. I ran outside and shouted up to Lilbern who was in the tower. He yelled down that the Germans invaded Poland. My husband liked working in the tower. He had good eyes. He spotted quite a few smokes, especially after lightning."*



Volunteers Needed for 2022 – That Means You

We are looking for volunteer stewards for Berry Hill, Jackie Jones, Stillwater, and Kane Fire Towers for 2022. We will provide you with training and a uniform. All you need to do is offer us one day of your time. If you can do more, that would be awesome too! At Berry Hill and Stillwater, our goal is to cover every summer weekend if possible. At Kane and Jackie Jones, we hope to begin a program with just certain weekends until we see how things go. The opportunity to spend the day at the tower and share your love of fire towers with the hiking public is truly an enjoyable way to give back.

We are going to have some options for work projects on fire towers in remote locations, in roadside locations, and places in between. We will have some trail work days and some minor Observer's cabin work to do as well. We are still putting together a schedule, but tentatively it is shaping up like this as the weather allows:

May – Blue Mt. Observer's Cabin Work, Buck Mt. Trail Work

June – Lyon Mt. Trail Work, Stillwater Trail Work, Buck Mt. Trail Work and Tower restoration

July – Speculator Tower Work, Pillsbury Tower Work

August – Pillsbury Tower Work

September – Lyon Mt Trail Work

October – Stillwater Trail Work

Yes, that is a lot to do in just 6 months. But with your help, we are confident we can accomplish all of this and more!

Calendar

Saturday, March 5th: 10:00am Grafton Lakes State Park Visitor Center - Memories of Observer Helen Ellett. Photo at right of Helen and her horse Rusty from 1952.

Saturday, May 7th: Wildflower Walk at Hadley Mt. sponsored by the Hadley Mt Fire Tower Committee.

Saturday, May 14th: Spring Trail work at Hadley Mt sponsored by the Hadley Mt. Fire Tower Committee.



Are you an FFLA Member? Would you like to join our busy NYS Chapter? It is very simple, just go to the National Page and join. <http://ffla.org/learn-more--join.html>

Laurie Rankin, Director
New York State Chapter
Forest Fire Lookout Association