



**Forest Fire Lookout Association
New York State Chapter
February 2023**

What a beautiful way to start the month by peeking out the windows of the St. Regis fire tower at the lovely, snowy views! This photo is the winner of our monthly photo contest on Facebook, having received the most likes. Many thanks to Debi Tebano for this beautiful photo taken in February of 2022. We thank all of the members who posted photos and liked photos. This photo is also the cover photo for our Facebook page until March 10th.



NYSDEC Seeking comments: The DEC is seeking comments on the proposed draft Work Plan Policy. It may affect some of the work of the State Chapter. Please note comments are due by February 27th. <https://www.dec.ny.gov/press/127075.html>

Website update: New on our website is a list of fire tower reading and viewing materials. In the past we had a book section in this newsletter, but eventually we seemed to run out of titles to share. We decided to put them all together in a list and placed them on the website. What did we miss? Please let us know as we are certain there are some titles that got left out. <http://nysffla.org/books.html>

Natural Heritage Trust: This is a NYSDEC program that allows you to donate directly to fire towers thought it does appear the funds are for paid stewards only, administered through the NYSDEC. Do you know of a program that has benefited from this trust? <https://www.naturalheritagetrust.org/about>

Correction: In last month's newsletter, I mentioned the FFLA Plus Membership and inadvertently typed Northern Woodlands rather than National Woodlands. I apologize to National Woodlands for this error.

In Memoriam: A lovely tribute to his Dad, New York State Forest Ranger, Frank Dorchak <https://www.adirondackalmanack.com/2023/02/in-memory-of-an-adirondack-ranger-aka-dad.html>

Around the Country: There is a unique program that assists fire fighters - <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/the-history-of-californias-inmate-firefighter-program-180980662/>

Significant Donation: We are very pleased to announce that noted fire tower author Marty Podskoch has donated all of his research materials and photographs to the NYS Chapter of the FFLA! This is a major collection that Marty lovingly gathered over many years to produce his books; *Fire Towers of the Catskills: Their History and Lore*, *Adirondack Fire Towers: Their History and Lore Northern District* and *Adirondack Fire Towers: Their History and Lore Southern District*, will be carefully sorted, scanned and stored and made available to all of our fire tower friends in the months ahead. It was such an honor to be offered these important pieces of history. While it will take some time to look through everything, if there is something you would like to check out, please let me know and we can make arrangements for you to come take a look. Our very sincere thanks to Marty for this wonderful gift!

A word from Marty about this donation: *“Thanks for saving history! Thank you so much for offering to sift through the mountain of stuff and save and scan helpful info. I really appreciate your help. The best to you and the history of the fire towers in NYS.”* We are very proud to do so, Marty! Marty has also graciously shared his Slide Show presentations. If someone is interested in hosting one of those, we would be happy to try to accommodate. Apologies for the picture – neither of us are selfie type photographers. <https://martinpodskoch.com/fire-towers/>



Follow Up: Last month we talked about the French Vermorel pump for fighting fires in the woods, allowing a wildland fire fighter to take some water with them. Retired NYS Forest Ranger, Paul Hartmann supplied us with some additional follow up history. Thank you Paul.

“In 1925, still not totally satisfied with the Vermorel Pump, District Ranger Ernest Blue, who was Headquartered in Cold Brook NY, just a few miles north of Utica, sought out help from the D. B. Smith company, who’d proven their worth and expertise in the design, development, and distribution of agricultural spray application equipment.

The result of this collaboration between District Forest Ranger Blue and D. B. Smith simply resulted in modifications to the nozzle that allow for a high-pressure spray for close up work and a straight stream that allowed fighting a fire from a short distance. By 1930 the Conservation Department had purchased 2000 Smith Indian Fire Pumps.”

More on this “new” piece of equipment, still in use today in many areas (which likely includes your local fire department) can be found on our website: <http://nysffla.org/links.html>

Fire Districts: The other big change in 1923 was the formation of fire districts under a new Conservation Law. Some would say “Why do we need more laws?”, but in this case there was a good reason. Put yourself back in the time frame of 1923 and realize how rudimentary the fire fighting equipment was and also consider the fire fighting forces available. At the time, there were fire towns, meaning that if you lived in Town ABC you could be asked to step forward and fight a fire in your town, taking you away from your work for the day. But you were likely to earn a few bucks to go fight the fire. While you fought the fire in Town ABC you would likely get paid, but if the fire crossed over into Township DEF, you were not likely to get paid for fighting the fire. So back to work you went, and the fire continued to grow in size. It was often a simple case of finances. Go back to work and get paid or keep working into the next township to fight the fire and not get paid.

Thus, the new law creating fire districts came into being. The new law provided that the Commission shall appoint fire wardens and organized the protection system. Fire bills also are paid by the Commission, including payroll.

The Commission appoints fire wardens and through its district Rangers, directs the work of fighting fires. The men who have done good work in fighting fires in the past were retained as fire wardens. The advantage of the change was that the fire preventive work was centralized under one head – the Conservation Commission, and made uniform throughout the entire area embraced by the Fire Districts. Local jealousies and the tendency to fight fires along town lines and neglect them if in the other towns had no place in the new organization. And, you got paid for your work!

Around the State

Poke O Moonshine: The Friends of Poke O Moonshine are accepting applications for a summit steward. The application contact is the Friends’ Coordinator, David Thomas-Train at friendsofpoko@gmail.com, and the application deadline is March 1, 2023. For additional information, visit www.pokeomoonshine.org. Please include cover letter, resume, and at least two references.

I read with great interest the editorial in the January / February edition of the Adirondack Explorer. Written by Publisher Tracy Ormsbee, it reminds us to remember Cathead Mt. Fire Tower and I couldn't agree more. In the past we have seen some significant numbers related to a land swap as one alternative. Let's continue to work toward a compromise.

“Give Key Amendments another chance. The fourth desired amendment is crucial: A Hamilton County land swap that would improve emergency communications in dead zones. The deal would also give the public hiking access to privately owned Cathead Mountain in Benson. It will help emergency responders who can't get signals or hear calls from certain areas in the county.

Hatchbrook Sportsmen Club owns Cathead, but the land around the mountain is state owned, which means motorized access is prohibited. To build a road to access the emergency tower, the county must cross a half mile of forest preserve, which requires a constitutional amendment. The amendment would allow club members motorized access to their club, which they don't have currently. That provision has prompted at least one environmental group to oppose the amendment. The two sides haven't been able to reach agreement on the land swaps and a payment, so the amendment was pulled from the legislative calendar last year before a vote.

For the sake of public safety, the parties need to come back together and work out a solution, whether by embracing this proposal or some alternative.”

Nice to see Mount Arab fire tower on the front cover of this same issue and inside in the article “A trio of satisfying hikes”, by Tim Rowland. Tim gives credit to our friends at FOMA. “It's subjective, of course, but Mount Arab probably has the best views, assisted in no small part by a fire tower complete with an observer's cabin, both beautifully restored by the Friends of Mount Arab.”

On the other hand in the article entitled “A Distinctive Mountain Called Rondaxe”, by Lisa Ballard, she mentioned “It reopened in 2005 for the pleasure of hikers, thanks to the Friends of Bald Mountain who continue to maintain it.” But her closing paragraph bothers me and I would guess the good folks at Friends of Bald Mountain when she glorifies graffiti, (which is a crime), by writing - “Satisfied and delightfully refreshed, I turned to descend the narrow stairs when some graffiti caught my eye. In black marker, someone had scratched a quote from Eden Phillipotts, an English author, playwright and poet: 'The universe is full of wonderful things patiently waiting for our minds to grow sharper.' Indeed, I had found a wonderful thing.” Sorry, Lisa, but we don't ever find graffiti to be a wonderful thing.

Azure: Enjoy a delightful walk and some history to the summit of Azure Mountain and its beautifully restored fire tower. <https://www.adirondackexplorer.org/stories/another-ascent-on-azure>

Speculator: Ice skating and a fire tower – what a unique opportunity awaits you in the Village of Speculator where you can enjoy the views from the fire tower and then climb down, strap on your skates and twirl around the ice in the pavilion (weather permitting of course).

Hurricane Mountain: Love fire towers? Love the Adirondacks? Come to Hurricane Mountain and enjoy the best views, a fire tower and so much more. The Friends of Hurricane are looking for volunteers for our summit steward program. As a volunteer, you get to share your passion for the outdoors with other hikers. You help educate them on how they can preserve the forest and provide them with guidance to keep them safe on the trails. Training is done in coordination with the Adirondack Mountain Club. If interested, contact Mary Jean Bland at mjbland@aol.com

Mt. Arab: Speaking of Friends of Mount Arab, (FOMA), we read in their newsletter that Summit Steward Tom Cullen plans to return in 2023 for his 13th year of stewarding. And look at the volunteers in this photo, putting the newsletter together. Thank you all! Photo below left from FOMA.

Nelson: Michael Pellet reported that on January 29th he climbed to the summit of Salt Hill where the remains of the Nelson fire tower lay on the ground and discovered they had been removed. He also stated the containers that were on site were also removed. You can still visit the Salt Hill State Forest: <https://www.dec.ny.gov/lands/126590.html> but the fire tower will now be gone. Photo by M. Pellet.



Historically, fire towers in New York State were utilized for not only fire spotting purposes, but also as public relations between the Conservation Department and the public and for communication purposes. Two of those purposes continue today in New York.

Stewards: Thinking about how much time stewards (who provide public relations) give programs and how much they enjoy it, makes me think we have several of you out there who might be interested in doing this in 2023. Are there other stewards like Tom Cullen, steward at FOMA who have been doing this for 10 or 12 years or longer? Are there more people like Jim who stewarded at Kane when we started the program there last year. Jim says it was a day to renew his faith: “It's easy to fall into a spirit of negativity. Watch television news, skim social media, read a newspaper...and you come away with a grim and depressing outlook...a hollow view for our world. But wait a minute. Watch, interact, and talk with others. I did so as a volunteer steward on Kane Mountain...and had my faith...renewed. She Said 'Yes!' A couple got engaged atop Kane's fire tower. The Kids. Man, what a kick to see the next generation jump for joy when they first see the fire tower, and then climb its 60 foot tall structure. And what a view you get from the top. I've been hiking these peaks for many years, being a steward on Kane has afforded me an opportunity to give a little back for the years of enjoyment in riches of New York State!” Would you like to give it a try in 2023? If so, please contact me to discuss the opportunities we have available. Photo at left by Mrs. Hopson.



Communication Partners: On a visit to Overlook Fire tower last week we ran into a fellow from Summits On The Air, (SOTA) working the air waves. This led to a lengthy discussion about how far away he was talking to people, the equipment he used, the challenges with the weather, and of course the history of communication at a fire tower. Historically fire towers utilized many different ways to communicate. Here is a look at another fellow from SOTA who recently visited Red Hill Fire Tower: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k8pze9bq96w>. There is a lot of radio “stuff” in the video, but in the last few minutes of the video, you will see him meeting with Red Hill Chair, Doug Hamilton, and you will get a tour of the Observer's cabin! SOTA is not the only group out there that we have run into.

Our friend and fire tower steward, Pat Tebano is a member of SARA (Schenectady Amateur Radio Association), and he talks to others far and wide while visiting fire towers. We have recently become acquainted with the Schoharie County Amateur Radio Association, who hold events at Leonard Hill. <https://www.schoharieamateurradio.org>. Out at Berry Hill Fire Tower, they hold HAM radio emergency communications exercises routinely. Along with our stewards, these folks can be great partners with a real vested interest in maintaining fire towers and their trails. Photo at right by Mrs. Tebano.

Bramley: The Friends of Bramley Mountain find themselves back to the drawing board when the local Town Board decided not to write a building permit for their project despite significant local support. https://www.thedailystar.com/news/local_news/fire-tower-supporters-want-building-permit-to-proceed/article_bd364126-ac09-11ed-95a6-4f6b472694b9.html

Tower Closings/Seasonal Road Closures

Sterling Forest and Jackie Jones - Towers are closed pending inspections.

Beebe Hill - Tower is closed pending repairs.

Goodnow: The Goodnow Mountain Trailhead, Trail and Firetower are CLOSED until 3/15 to accommodate an active timber harvest.

Moose River Plains Recreation Area is closed: This affects the trailhead to Wakely Fire Tower.

Sundown Wild Forest - The section of Dinch Road that leads to the Red Hill Fire Tower Trailhead in the Sundown Wild Forest is seasonally maintained and not plowed throughout the winter. Visitors should note that the Dinch Road Trailhead location is generally inaccessible throughout the winter. Visitors who wish to visit the Red Hill Firetower should consider using the trail and parking area on Denning Road.

Balsam Lake Mountain Wild Forest - The eastern 2-miles of Beaverkill Road / Turnwood Road that leads to the Balsam Lake Mountain Trailhead is only seasonally maintained and not plowed throughout the winter. Visitors should note that this trailhead location is generally inaccessible throughout the winter.

Calendar

The 2023 Western Conference will be held in St. Regis, Montana the weekend of July 8-9, 2023

The 2023 Eastern Summer Regional Conference will be held on August 12-13, 2023, in Andover, N.J.

Visits done in the last month; Red Hill, Overlook, and Rock Rift.

I have been reading about brush fires here in NYS in early February! We have had some interesting weather and we have some very dry, bare ground in the southern parts of the state along with some significant winds too. Will we continue to see an early fire season or will we see a return to more normal winter conditions soon? I for one, certainly hope its winter!

Sincerely,

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