



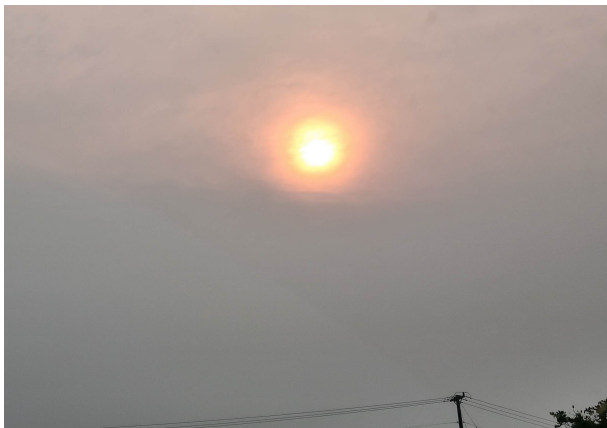
**Forest Fire Lookout Association
New York State Chapter
June 2023**

As is normally the case in the late spring in NYS we have seen some wild swings in weather and a fair number of flying insects swinging by as well. It is black fly season – don't go anywhere outdoors without appropriate covering or repellent (which may or may not be effective). Retired Forest Ranger Gary Lee mentioned their assistance with a few things he was doing “There were a few mosquitoes and black flies, but there were plenty of visitors to share them with. I also got some plants in with the help of the black flies and mosquitoes who held the hoe much of the time.”



Our Neighbors

Canada: As I look back at last month's newsletter we did mention the wildfires in Canada. Being good neighbors, Canada was happy to share so we experienced several record breaking days with hazy smoke in the air from wildfires in Quebec. We had warnings to stay indoors if possible. We did enjoy some lovely sunsets while the smell of smoke was evident each time you ventured outdoors. Those fires are continuing to burn and may burn for several months so we may see more hazy, smoky days.



The NYSDEC did send a Ranger to assist: From the 6-3 Bulletin, “First 2023 Deployment to Help Fight Wildland Fires with Compact Partners. The DEC Forest Ranger will serve as the crew boss of an interstate Northeastern Forest Fire Protection Compact crew comprised of firefighters from Connecticut, New Hampshire, and Maine to assist efforts in Nova Scotia.”

Wildland firefighters are coming for other countries to assist in this massive effort:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/06/17/world/americas/canada-wildfires-season.html>

May all remain safe and may they get some help in the form of much needed rain soon.

A new field guide to fire towers: Hiking Fire Lookouts New England is the latest Falcon Guide written by Mark Aiken. It is beginning to show up in bookstores and will help you visit fire towers in our neighboring states. Barnes and Noble should have it in stock soon.

The Winner of our Monthly photo contest is this photo submitted by Adrienne Kallner taken in the Azure Mt Fire Tower cab in June of 2019. What a spectacular view! Adrienne received the most likes for this photo on our Facebook page. Congratulations Adrienne – we will feature your photo as our cover photo until July 10th.



Around the State

Utsayantha: Fortunately there was a chill in the air on the morning of May 25th that kept the bugs away. On that morning following a classroom presentation earlier in the week, 27 third graders from South Kortright Central School joined me for a hike to Mount Utsayantha. We were also joined by their teachers and bus driver so the children could experience first hand the view from a fire tower. Prior to my visit, the teacher read “Finding the Blaze” by Maryellen Wandereyer to the students in preparation for my visit. During the classroom presentation I was able to share a map and alidade that an Observer would use in the tower and a string map that a Forest Ranger would use in their truck to help triangulate a smoke that was spotted. As we hiked along the service road to the summit, we stopped often to learn more about fire towers, how to stay safe in the woods, and our friend Smokey Bear. We also looked for items that could be found for a scavenger hunt. The discussions were lively and thoughtful and a great deal of fun! Once at the summit, the lovely park that surrounds the tower and is cared for by the Village of Stamford was the perfect spot for the children to relax, toss around some Smokey frisbees, and enjoy lunch while they took turns climbing the tower and taking in the view! All too soon we had to hike back down to the bus and end what was a fun and educational day!

A few days later I received the following note from one of the teachers Ms. Hoffman “Thank you so much for helping with this experience. The kids had a great time and made a wonderful memory. Hopefully they will all take their families back to visit. We would definitely like to continue this in the future!” Yes, Ms. Hoffman I will be happy to continue this annual field trip!

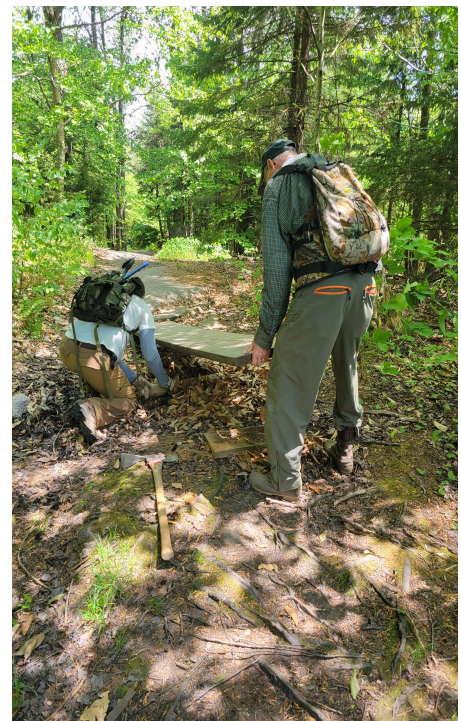


Ranger Reports: Normally we would feature the fires that were reported in the last month, but with our unusually dry conditions, that report contained 19 wildfires! That is far too many to repeat here.

Kane: This is our second year of having a steward program at Kane Mt. Following a very successful pilot program in 2022 where our goal was simply to be at the tower one weekend per month, we hoped to expand the program this year. It looks like all of our volunteer stewards from last year are returning to the program and we have several new volunteers joining us as well. We had to move around our orientation dates several times in an effort to accommodate all, but we are confident we will have an enthusiastic steward presence on the mountain once again! Past Fire Tower Observer Rick Miller was able to join us for one of the orientation dates and we greatly enjoyed visiting with him as we hiked to the summit. Here is a great photo from Rick of the old Observer's cabin at the summit, now gone.



Stillwater Trail Work: On National Trails Day as has become the tradition, we completed our annual spring trail work at Stillwater Fire Tower trail. Many thanks go to Sue, Doug, Terry, and Tim who helped make the work go smoothly and there certainly was work. Including some rather large trees to remove from the trail! We enjoyed all of the history that Retired Forest Ranger Terry Perkins was able to share with us.



Number Four: Visits to old, new and perspective towers: Following our Stillwater Trail Work, FFLA Executive Committee member Sue Kirk and I did a bit of exploring. We made a stop at the former Number 4 Fire Tower site which is a lovely spot just off the Number 4 road where one can find a marked primitive campsite where we speculate the old Observers cabin may have stood. Bill Hill wrote in 2018 about his visit there and notes a puzzling thing - "The footers are a bit different than I'm used to seeing, but it was an Aeromotor LX25 instead of the standard LS40. An odd thing were the scribes in the cement. The initials "VME" appear several times, but the dates vary by 10 years - 1918 & 1928. Anyone know anything about this? I have seen that Bill Starr's Fire tower list shows it as opening in 1928. It was built by the Fischer Forestry & Realty Co. and turned over to the state around 1945. The tower was originally 75' tall, now it has been shortened to 25' and stands at the DEC demonstration area in Lowville." In 2019 Fred Knauf noted the following on Facebook "By 1928, Fisher Forestry decided that they needed a better structure and erected the Number Four Lookout, near Number Four, NY. This tower was an LX-25, the only one of its type erected in NY, and was done so because it featured less expensive ladder style stairs vs. the standard Conservation Department towers. An observer's cabin and the normal style stairs were added in 1945 which replaced the ladder style stairs."

Gomer Hill: From Number 4 site, Sue and I headed to the Carpenter Hill ski trails. Our reasoning for this was that an inquiry about the Gomer Hill Fire Tower and possible restoration or re-opening ended with this from the NYSDEC: There are no near term plans to restore this tower or open it to the public. The tower is currently located on a 1.5 acre administrative access only parcel. The Tug Hill East Unit Management Plan states that the Gomer Hill Fire Tower will be moved to the Carpenter Hill Ski Trails "if the opportunity presents itself". Talking with the Forester who wrote this plan, it sounds like this would only occur if radio equipment were removed from the tower. So we visited the Carpenter Hill ski trails area to find that it is a heavily used ATV area where many people were out enjoying rides on this day. We hiked the very short distance to the highest point in the section of state forest where one would imagine the fire tower would be situated. While the view would certainly be stunning from the top of a tower in this location, it is completely wooded and would be very accessible. We then went to visit the Gomer Hill tower which continues to stand tall and proud, but heavily encumbered by communications equipment.

Balsam Lake: NYSDEC continues to stress the importance of the visitor experience in the Catskills and the need for education to protect the natural resources. Thus I continue to be puzzled by the lack of any action at the Balsam Lake Mt Fire Tower and Observer's cabin by either the NYSDEC or the CCCD. In both cases, historical structures that have been lovingly restored by volunteers are in great need of repair and are unsafe. Yet no plans are in place to repair these structures. NYSDEC encourages visitors to come to the Catskills and "do the fire tower challenge" yet they do not invest in the very facilities they want people to visit. The fire tower windows are in such poor condition at Balsam Lake that some are taped in place and some have some wooden supports over them to attempt to hold them in place. Visitors who loiter under the tower on a rainy day are quite likely to find debris from the windows falling on them. Due to the poor condition of the windows, it would be unwise to have the map, alidade and panoramics in place so the cab. These items certainly enhance the visitor experience by having the volunteer steward there illustrating how to use the alidade and map to spot smoke. The Observer's cabin museum has been a favorite of visitors for many years. With displays on the history of Balsam Lake, the history of the Catskill Fire Tower Project, items used for wildland fire fighting, trail markers and what they represent, a children's touch board, Smokey Bear posters on everything from mushrooms to trees, animals to butterflies, an old telephone, maps and more. If the primary goal is to ensure safe and enjoyable visitor experiences while caring for the natural resource, then immediate action must be taken to keep visitors safe.

Berry Hill: We held orientation at Berry Hill on May 23rd and set some goals to enhance the visitors experience at this facility.

Sharing the FFLA mission: In last month's newsletter, I mentioned that I had just done a podcast about the FFLA and NYS Fire Towers, but the episode did not actually air until this week. You can find it here where fire tower discussions begin at about 6 minutes. Thanks so much to Papa Bear Hikes for the opportunity to discuss fire towers!

<https://www.buzzsprout.com/1467697/13040615>

I was honored to be nominated by Retired Forest Ranger Gary Lee for induction into the NYS Outdoorsmen Hall of Fame for my work as the Director of the NYS FFLA. The induction banquet was held on May 21st. There we (my husband and I) met Gary and his lovely wife Karen, as well as Harry and Anna Peck from the Friends of Stillwater Fire Tower Group for a delicious dinner and the presentation of the awards. I was humbled by this award for without all of the wonderful volunteers of the NYS Chapter, there would be little work done and only very small accomplishments. I humbly accepted the award on behalf of all of you who have stepped forward through your contributions of time and money to make the NYS Chapter a very successful entity that does much to preserve our fire towers and their history and to honor those who served in the towers.

<https://www.adirondackalmanack.com/2023/06/nys-outdoorsmen-hall-of-fame-12-new-members-3-special-award-members-inducted.html>



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

Beebe Hill - Tower is closed pending repairs.

Goodnow: The Goodnow Mountain Firetower cab is CLOSED until further notice.

Calendar

6-24-23: Mt. Adams Fire Tower Maintenance Day <https://adkhighpeaksfoundation.org/mt-adams/>

7-6-23: Poke-O-Moonshine - Community Trail Work Day- <https://www.pokeomoonshine.org/events>

7-7 – 9: The 2023 FFLA Western Conference will be held in St. Regis, Montana

7-20-23: Lyon Mt brushing in switchbacks

7-22-23: Slide Show Presentation at Bowman Lake State Park

7-29 and 30: Snowy work project to repair fencing and railing, maybe paint?

8-5, 6, 19, 20, 26, 27: Pillsbury work project to finish the cab if radio equip is moved, clean summit, repurpose lumber for board walk

8-12 and 13: The 2023 FFLA Eastern Summer Regional Conference will be held in Andover, N.J.

8-23-23: Registration Deadline for Annual Lighting Event

9-2-23: Fire Tower Festival in Speculator

9-2-23: Lighting Event*** 9-3-23: Lighting Event Rain Date

9-16 & 17: Lyon Mt Fall Trail Work

The Tenth Annual Lighting of the Fire Tower event!!!

We will begin taking registrations for this event on July 17th! We will be including some special items for this special year, so think about being part of the excitement. August 22nd will be the deadline to register this year.

As I close this newsletter, my excitement is growing. In just a few short weeks we are heading to Montana to attend the Western Conference of the FFLA where we will visit fire towers, share information, and enjoy the scenery with fellow fire tower officianados! Can't wait – so be prepared to hear about that in next month's newsletter!

Best,

Laurie

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