



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

November, that time when it is winter one day and a lovely summer afternoon the next. The animals are busy getting those last acorns, berries, etc. harvested prior to their winter sleep or to put on that layer of fat and dense coat of fur to protect them from the winter chill. A layer of snow may already blanket the earth.

November is the time the Fire Tower Observer of the past was busy closing up their towers for the year. Depending on the year, they were carrying those heavy battery packs down out of the tower, putting away their binoculars, removing any clothing left in the cabin so that the mice did not use it to nest in. They turned the chair upside down on the table for the winter and secured the shutters. Some anxiously awaited this day as it meant a change to another job or time to grab their rifle and go hunting. Sometimes (but not routinely) it was time to stay on the mountain as the fall fire season was a busy one.



Vanderwhacker Cabins by Gary Lee date unknown



John O'Donnell 1914
courtesy - Teresa Keel

Observer John O'Donnell 1914 M. Podskoch collection

Here at the FFLA we have completed our Stewardship programs and our work programs. While there may be an occasional summer like day, those cold and wet days become more prevalent and create poor working conditions. We look forward to the quieter time to reflect on what worked and what did not work this year and we put together our end of year reports. We begin to plan for next year already. And it looks like 2024 will be an exciting year for fire towers, as you will read below!

One thing that continues to go well each and every year is our monthly photo contest on our Facebook page. This month's winning photograph was taken by Bill Hill, of Loon Lake Fire Tower, in November of 2018. The tower against that beautiful blue sky sure is lovely! Thanks to all who participated and congratulations to Bill!



AROUND THE STATE

Wrapping up some great things happening around the state, we find that Smokey made an appearance at the Balsam Lake end of year gathering as well as some other events.

Ranger report 10-24: **Greene County Public Outreach:** On Oct. 14 and 15, Smokey Bear wrapped up National Fire Prevention Week with a busy weekend of events. On Oct. 14, Smokey and Forest Ranger Martin attended the Big Indian-Oliveria Fire Department's pancake breakfast. Smokey met members of the department and the Ladies Auxiliary to thank them for everything they do to help prevent wildfires in the Catskill Forest Preserve. Later that day, Smokey, Captain Gierloff, and Rangers Franceschina and Martin attended the Belleayre Fall Festival. At the Festival, Rangers spoke about their job duties and how the public can help prevent wildfires. Smokey Bear rode the Catskill Thunder Gondola to the top of the mountain. On Oct. 15, Rangers Franceschina and Martin attended an end-of-year gathering for the Balsam Lake Mountain Fire Tower volunteers. Smokey and Rangers thanked the volunteers for their efforts to educate the public about fire safety.

Balsam Lake: And great news from the DEC Report - **Balsam Lake Mountain Wild Forest** – DEC Operations staff recently installed new windows in the Balsam Lake Mountain Fire Tower. Look at those beauties! The volunteer crew is very thankful to see these new windows as the old ones were in very poor condition. These new windows are fully operational and can be opened for cleaning and maintenance purposes. Many thanks to the Operations staff!



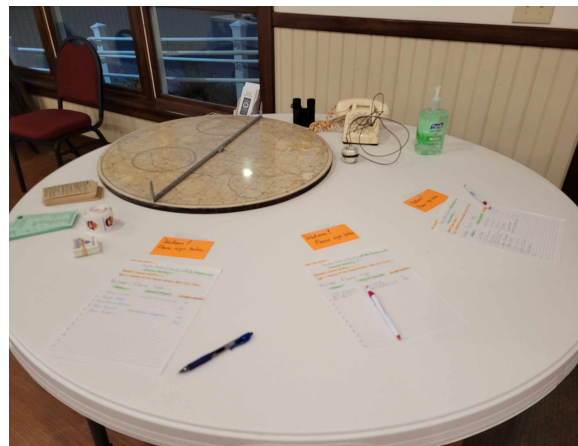
Bramley: On November 8th at EIGHTYMAIN in Delhi, a fantastic benefit dinner was held to support the work of the Friends of Bramley Mountain. From FOBM President, Ann Roberti - *“The dinner celebrated many recent accomplishments for the tower; Delaware County’s agreement to fully support the tower, the O’Connor Foundation’s decision to approve a \$10,000 grant, and the DEP’s work preparing the mountain top and the Summit Trail, and their agreement to build a secondary parking lot.”* Ann went on to say *“There was an amazing amount of positive energy, and many fire tower supporters who had never met discovered that there were surprising connections between them. The dinner raised over \$2,500 for the fire tower project! Again, thanks to James Arrafut and Will Johnson for dreaming up and putting on this extraordinary event.”* Ann said *“We are beyond grateful to EIGHTYMAIN and to all the fire tower supporters who attended the benefit dinner. The tasting menu was creative and, most importantly, delicious. The staff at EIGHTYMAIN could not have been any more friendly or attentive.”* You can feel the positive vibes in these photos. We look forward to seeing the Bramley Mt tower back in its original location in 2024!



Vanderwhacker: On October 24th, I had the pleasure of providing a slide show presentation about fire towers, specifically Vanderwhacker history to the Minerva Historical Society. We had a wonderful audience of nearly 30, many who had strong connections to the fire tower and those who worked there. Observer Kerry Killon's family was in attendance. I believe it was Mike, a member of the original Friends group that was in attendance. The Minerva Central School Social Studies teacher and his family were in attendance and he shared that his classes all get information on the Vanderwhacker Fire Tower and its important role in local history. A gentleman who fought wildfires back in the Cold River area and other locations shared some stories with us. I learned much and I hope the group did to. Thanks for having me! <https://www.minervahistoricalsociety.org/>



Vanderwhacker Fire Tower 1917 Podskoch collection



Minerva Historical Society presentation table

Leonard Hill: As many of you know who have followed us over the years, it has been just over 5 years since we began discussions with the NYS DEC regarding possible restoration of this tower. We have submitted our application for an agreement with the DEC and we have been anxiously awaiting an engineers report. This week we had some great news from the DEC: *“While we haven’t yet received an engineering report, we have been able to conduct some minor repairs necessary to replace the roof. **The public will not be allowed to access the tower until the engineer report**, which will include a review of the supporting steel, but we’re headed in the right direction. As of last week a few of the stair treads have been replaced and a floor has been installed in the cab.”* This is wonderful news!!!

100 Years: NYS Parks will celebrate their 100th Anniversary in 2024. It just so happens that the Commissioner, Eric Kulleseid was a visitor to Kane Mt. Fire Tower this past summer, when we were holding an FFLA Executive Committee meeting there. Our Committee members and volunteer stewards Debi and Pat Tebano were on duty. They reported - *“We got many thanks & praises from the NYS Commissioner of Parks, Recreation & Historic Preservation. We told him who we were representing.”* To hear more of the history of the park and plans for the centennial – check out this link beginning at ~ minute 13: <https://nynow.wmht.org/blogs/full-episodes/full-episode-environmental-bond-act-nys-parks-commissioner>. Could we get the Jackie Jones and Sterling Forest Fire Towers reopened for the anniversary?

Kane: Speaking of 100 years – at our end of year gathering for the Kane Mt. Stewards, we really got our conversation moving forward in earnest about ideas to celebrate the centennial which will occur in 2025. Last year was our pilot steward program and this year we tried to expand it and the volunteers stepped forward and did an awesome job of covering the tower on most weekends. Feedback on October 8th from both visitors and our steward - *“Just wanted to share that there were quite a few former locals returning for a visit and several said how thankful they were for the volunteers as they have noticed a marked improvement in the conditions the last few years. I only steward twice, but both times it was a real pleasure!”*

Gomer Hill: The final Tug Hill East UMP was out this past month. There were a few items listed that give us pause. “Gomer Hill Radio Facility is a 1.5-acre stand-alone parcel that once had an operational fire tower. The fire tower still stands and is now home to several radio antennas. This parcel is administrative access only, it is not open to the public.” “Management action – If the opportunity presents itself, relocate the Gomer Hill Fire Tower to the Carpenter Hill ski trails.” Though we would love to see the tower saved should it ever be removed from its current location, we are not certain that relocation to that site would be ideal due to heavy motorized vehicle use in the area.

Around the Country

The link below will take you to a delightful story about a currently staffed tower in California. It is a great story of the importance that towers continue to provide to the fire protection community across the country. It also illustrates how one has to simply get out of the way of fire at times. <https://view.email.kqed.org/?qs=5309b2a1f973bb90ff4e8fdd3167e439d9d6940779f7efc7a893744d5a42336f72a069d2590b9d8c784ed5c1dbae2db67a180277d2f8bb4be457e8604c2a8bb6c8c7b1dee076d2c3b3bbd7152b7260d6>

10th Annual Fire Tower Lighting, continued...



Azure by Marianne Herbert



Balsam Lake by Tom Rankin



Bald by Steve Robotham

As we approach holiday shopping time, please take time to seek out organizations that support fire towers. Friends of groups generally have their own websites and merchandise sales. A quick google search generally brings you to their offerings. Meanwhile, if you would be able to support our work through your membership or a donation, we would greatly appreciate it.
<http://ffla.org/index.html>



Blue by Tara Anne Pleat

10th Annual Fire Tower Lighting, continued...



Hunter by Tim Roberts



Poke O Moonshine by Nancy Gucker Birdsall

CALENDAR

SUNDAY, JANUARY 28: Mammal Tracking with Elizabeth Lee. Join master naturalist Elizabeth, for the highlight hike of the winter! Meet at the Observer's Trail (lower) parking at area at 9:30A.M. Bring ample food and clothing for 2-4 hours out in the snow. Limit of 10 participants. To sign up, text David Thomas-Train at 802-989-6134. <https://www.pokeomoonshine.org/>

Happy Thanksgiving! May you find a moment to give thought and gratitude to those who came before us, creating this amazing system of fire protection in our state. I am very thankful for all of the community of fire tower friends, donors and volunteers. I hope you will be able to gather with family and friends this Thanksgiving to celebrate and smile with one another.

Laurie

Laurie Rankin, Director
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Forest Fire Lookout Association
<http://www.nysffla.org>