



**Forest Fire Lookout Association
New York State Chapter
February 2024**

Photo of the month: The winner of our Facebook photo contest this month was Kate Dopp with her photo of Kane Mountain Fire Tower taken in February of 2023. What a great start snowy, winter photo! Congratulations to Kate and to many thanks to all who participated! There were some really awesome photos submitted!



AROUND THE COUNTRY

Those of you who are members know that in addition to our State Chapter monthly newsletter, members also receive The Lookout Network, the full color quarterly magazine of the national organization with no ads! This is something you can read from cover to cover and everything is about towers! There is always New York news contained within the pages. Do you have something you would like to submit to the Lookout Network to be included in an upcoming issue? It could be a story of a fire tower visit, some old photographs or other items to share. Editor, Gary Weber would love to hear from you! weblookout@roadrunner.com

Your vote for fire towers counts! Lego designers are seeking votes for their lookout tower kit design. The kit contains 1,370 Legos and includes every lookout's most essential companion, the coffee maker. The creator Stefan has his creation up for votes at the BrickLink website. The more votes it gets means that Lego might actually make it a model!

<https://www.bricklink.com/v3/designer-program/series-4/1198/Fire-Lookout-Tower>

2024 Job Opportunities

Hadley Mt Fire Tower Committee: We are looking for a summit steward for the summer season! If anyone is interested, please contact us at hadleymtfiretowercommittee@gmail.com.

Poke O Moonshine: Friends of Poke-O-Moonshine are seeking applicants for the 2024 season. To see all the position entails and to obtain an application contact the Friends' Coordinator, David Thomas-Train at friendsofpoko@gmail.com. The application deadline is March 1. The successful candidate will be hired by April 1.

AROUND THE STATE

From Rick Miller's archives – thank you Rick! In 1979, the Fire Observation Stations had many components. Standard equipment was listed as the tower, map table, map, telephone, and cabin. The Observer's duties included a telephone test, caring for the flag, reporting fires, completing reports, and the standard operating procedure in the fire towers.

I want to focus on the telephone. “Each fire tower in the NYS Fire Management system is provided with a telephone that is tied into a commercial net. These telephones are built to high standards which allow the Observer to get in touch with the ranger force or fire warden with the least amount of delay in reporting forest fires. Often times Observers act as dispatchers and require this kind of communication between their towers and sources of help.

In order to secure the maximum efficiency in the operation of a telephone system, the standards of construction must be maintained at all times. The lines should be gone over thoroughly each year in the spring, bad connections cut out and new ties, wires or insulators put in where necessary. Care should be taken to see that the line wire does not rub against a tree and that the work of removing brush, limbs, etc., is thoroughly done. It is just as important to see that insulated wire is kept free from contact with brush or trees as it is open wire, because one never knows where the insulation will wear off and thus cause trouble which is usually difficult to locate.

The Observer should test his telephone by calling central, or his Ranger, the first thing each morning and in times of dry weather at least two or three times during the day, in order to determine whether the line is in working order. If the line is found to be out of order, the Observer should immediately go down over the line and endeavor to locate the trouble. Location of trouble in the telephone line is of the first importance because the observation station is of little or no use, unless it has telephone service.”



Photo is of Forest Ranger Tom Derby on the pole and Forest Ranger Longware on the ground. Circa 1946 from the Paul Hartmann collection.

A phone operator's work: For more information on how phones worked in the past, I strongly encourage you to listen to this podcast, with Phone operator Lula Anderson. Lula explains what being a switchboard operator was all about. Guaranteed you will learn something new! <https://www.kaatscast.com/telephone-tales-with-switchboard-operator-lula-anderson/>

Open/Closed

Spruce Mt. Fire Tower remains closed, but the trail has reopened.

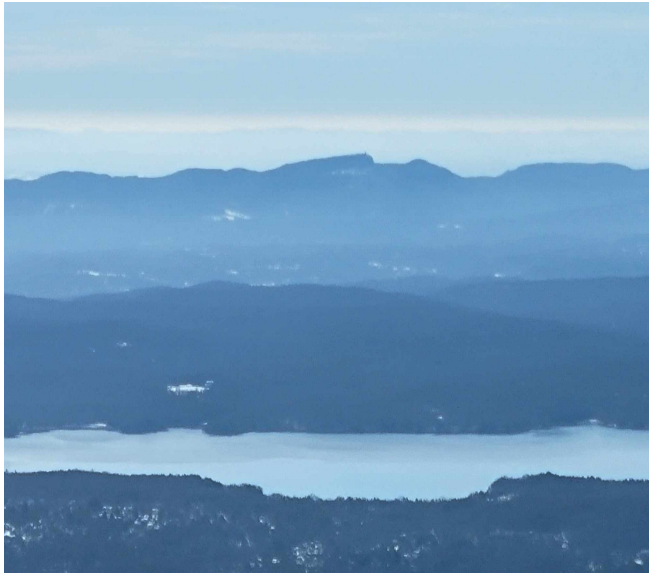
Sterling Forest, Jackie Jones, Beebe Hill, also remain closed. Goodnow fire tower cab remains closed.

Bramley Mountain: As noted in my visits for the month, it was fantastic to see all of the preparation work that was done for the return of the Bramley Mountain Fire Tower to its original location this spring! As you can see, the summit area has been carefully cleared by the NYC DEP for the construction, yet they thoughtfully left the old tower footers, large rocks to rest on, including one with the old guy wire eye bolt. Thanks so much for all this prep work!

Additionally, the Friends of Bramley Mountain Fire Tower have another matching grant challenge! <https://bramleymountainfiretower.org>. Many thanks to Katharine and William Aubrey for this generous offer!

January trivia answer: What currently standing fire tower in the state is at the highest elevation and what currently standing fire tower in the state is at the lowest elevation? Answers included several who got the currently standing fire tower in the state that is at the highest elevation correct, Hunter Fire Tower at 4040'. We had various answers for the currently standing fire tower in the state at the lowest elevation and none got what we believe is the correct answer, the Former Moosehead Mountain Fire Tower now Industry City Fire Tower at just under 10' in elevation.

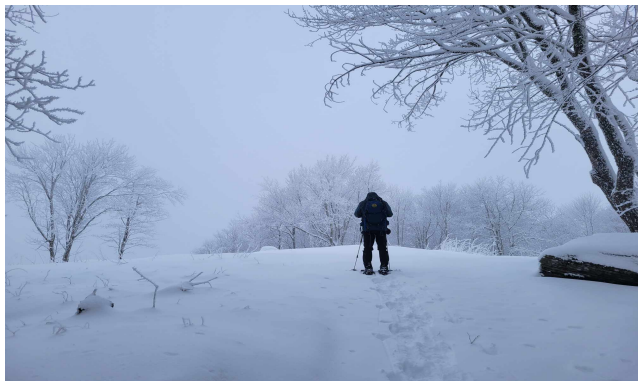
Visits: It has been a bit of a challenge to get out this last month for a variety of reasons, but we still managed to hike to both Overlook Fire Tower and Bramley Mountain Fire Tower sites this month. DEP has done all of the site preparation for the construction work to begin in the May of 2024.



Skytop from Overlook



Catskills from Overlook



Cleared construction site on Bramley



Eye bolt from old guy wires

Publications

“History and Legends of the Northern Adirondacks Volume 1” is a very well researched book by author John Sasso whom we have featured previously in our newsletters. This is a first edition compilation of many of John's research papers, includes many fire towers. The book is available on Amazon. <https://www.amazon.com/dp/1961680076>

"Headstrong Hallie!" The story of Hallie Morse Daggett, the First Female 'Fire Guard' by Aimee Bissonette is a book that is recommended for ages 5 to 9. Hallie Morse Daggett grew up near California's Siskiyou Mountains, and she learned that the most dangerous thing in the forest wasn't bears or coyotes or wildcats: it was forest fires. So when she grew up, Hallie was determined to join the U.S. Forest Service as a fire spotter. She applied again and again but was always told that the Forest Service didn't hire women because they couldn't handle the isolation and physical demands of the job. Finally, in 1913, a fire-lookout position opened up right before fire season was starting and the Forest Service finally agreed to give Hallie a chance. While her male colleagues took bets on how long she'd last in the tiny, isolated cabin, Hallie defied all of their expectations. In her first season, she spotted 40 fires and she went on to work as a fire spotter for 15 years! Illustrated by artist David Hohn, this vivid picture book pays tribute to a little-known pioneer who blazed the way for other women in the Forest Service by refusing to take 'no' for an answer. The book is available on Amazon.

The Forest Rangers: A History, published in 1987 to celebrate and commemorate one hundred years of the DEC Forest Ranger force, is now in the public domain courtesy of the NYS Library and free for public use. Adirondack Wild features this important history with a new introduction by its author, Forest Ranger, Capt., Ret. Lou Curth. Lou writes well in this new introduction about being an author: *“In 1984, NYS DEC Division of Lands & Forests Director Norm VanValkenburgh invited me to write a history of the forest ranger force to be included as part of DEC’s plans to celebrate the Forest Preserve Centennial the following year, 1985. A few months earlier, I had begun a new job as a ranger lieutenant for the Adirondack High Peaks after serving twenty years as a forest ranger in four different ranger districts, doing all the things that rangers do. In my new job, I was expecting many new challenges, but writing a book was NOT one of them! To make a long story short, with much trepidation, I agreed to write the book.”* Thank you Lou for being such an amazing author as well as an amazing Forest Ranger! Check it all out and celebrate our DEC Forest Rangers rich heritage and vital mission at <https://adirondackwild.org/media/the-forest-rangers/>

The Conservationist: The February March issue of the Conservationist has a fire tower on the front cover – Balsam Lake! While it is always great to see a fire tower on that front cover, it was a bit confusing to read the article entitled “Towering Women” by Peter Benoit. The opening paragraph tells us the names of 8 women who worked in Adirondack Fire Towers as Observers. But there was a Catskill Fire Tower on the front cover? It then goes on to say that the towers were built to provide shelter for the Observers. I thought they were built to provide an elevated vantage point for Observers to look for smoke? The article goes on to include a great photograph of Rock Rift Observer Linda Trask in the Catskills, but it features text about Linda Lamphere of St. Regis Fire Tower. Always great to see fire towers featured, but some fact checking should be in order before something goes to print.

You can see the article here:

<https://cloud.3dissue.com/129417/129610/151833/FebMar24NYSConsMag/index.html>

In Memoriam: This past month I received sad news of the passing of Norman Van Valkenburgh last summer. Norm was the NYS DEC Director of the Division of Lands and Forests, a Surveyor, Author, native of the Spruceton Valley in the Catskills, and family friend. Up until this past year, we exchanged Christmas cards and correspondence on a regular basis. In one of his last letters he shared *“I gloried in backland surveys that required an hour or more to walk to the first transit station of the day. I take a lot of my early morning walks here (meaning Maine) off the trails following the remains of old wire fences, blazed lines, and stone walls just to find out where they lead but mostly to see if I'm still able to pick up some some sign of a boundary line.”*

Norm was a supporter of the work of this organization, often sending assistance to us for our work. We mailed him a copy of this newsletter each and every month so that he could keep up to date on what was happening with fire towers. While Norm was always a staunch supporter of wilderness, he always supported fire towers. Norm's love for wilderness and his time spent in the woods, never waned. His love for wild places was not diminished by the the hand of man when it was thoughtfully done. In his words were what I believe most visitors to fire towers feel. I ask your forgiveness as I share a quote Norm wrote in Old Stone Walls Catskills Land and Lore from page 36, one I have shared here before about a climb to Hunter Mountain Fire Tower. *“Joe was glad to see me as I was his first visitor of the day. We talked about the condition of the trail, the upcoming forest fire season, a bear hunt he had been on the last fall, the porcupine problem, the variety of the visitors to the tower, and generally solved a few of the troubles of the world. With the aid of his field glasses, I picked out many landmarks....it was a relaxing hour and I left with the feeling that this man, this tower, this trail, and others like them were not out of place in the Forest Preserve, but rather, enhanced this vast public ownership.”*

On page 51 in that same book I once again share Norm's words and his deep passion for his time spent in the woods. *'The Winter Woods Chapter ' – “I finally find the line. The blazes I put on the trees long ago have grown over and catch only a surveyor's practiced eye. I follow them down the hill to the stream bank. I hit the ice a few times with my ax. It sounds solid, but cracks ominously as I cross over. The line on the far side follows an old stone wall. The hill is a lot steeper than I remember and I stop often to rest. I pretend it's the deep snow that slows me down. The view off to the west widens as I climb. I brush the snow from a flat rock and sit leaning against the maple tree behind it. The snow has stopped. The sky has cleared and the sun warms my face. The old surveyor I first worked with said the Catskills were the 'land of magnificent distance.' Indeed they are. My lemonade – turned to slush by the cold – and peanut butter and jam sandwich become a gourmet meal because of the beauty of my surroundings. The rest of the day is anticlimactic. It's all downhill from here. The snowplow has been by and the side of my car is plastered with snow. I imagine the driveway will be plowed shut when I get home. It is. However, even that doesn't dim the pleasure I found in the winter woods. It's a treat to behold close-up, the charms of any season, but the experience becomes truly magical in the quiet of winter.”*

Norm was a friend to the wilderness, the state forest preserve and our family, often stopping at the house to chat with Mom and Dad. The last time I saw him, he was sitting in the living room sharing memories with them. I sincerely believe that he and Dad are now sharing some stories and discussing how the true the line is!

Until next month...

Laurie