



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

The lovely photo here that won our monthly Facebook photo contest was submitted by Steven Heeren. It was taken in October of 2023 of the Hadley Mountain Fire Tower and received the most likes in our contest. Congratulations to Steven! Many thanks to all who submitted photos and to all who voted.



AROUND THE STATE

Vanderwhacker: DEC Announced the completion of the 60-Foot Bridge in Vanderwhacker Mountain Wild Forest, restoring public access to Moose Pond Club Road and the Fire Tower Trail. Closed since August 2021 due to structural concerns, the 28-foot-long bridge spanning Vanderwhacker Brook was deemed unsafe for vehicle use. While the bridge was out of commission, hikers and campers were forced to park along Route 28N, adding six miles round trip to their trek to the fire tower. With the replacement now in place, visitors can once again drive to the Moose Pond Club Road trailhead, shortening the hike.

The \$500,000 bridge replacement project, funded through NY Works, involved a complete redesign to meet modern stream crossing guidelines and enhance the bridge's climate resiliency. The new structure was built with sustainability in mind, providing better protection against flooding while improving long-term accessibility to this popular area of the Adirondacks. There are six designated primitive campsites along Moose Pond Club Road, including the Vanderwhacker Mountain Tent Site, conveniently located a short distance from the Tower Trail. The trail to the summit of Vanderwhacker Mountain extends 2.5 miles, climbing 1,650 feet to the peak at 3,386 feet. At the summit, visitors will find the historic Vanderwhacker Mountain Fire Tower, offering a 360-degree view of the Adirondack region, including the High Peaks to the north and the scenic Boreas River valley to the east.

Berry Hill: On Friday evening October 4th, two dozen people gathered at the Berry Hill Fire Tower for Astronomy night. Generally closed from dusk to dawn, but a great place for star gazing, we offered refreshments, an astronomer with binoculars, a telescope, and a laser pointer for all to enjoy a tour of the night sky for this special event. Clouds rolled in and out a few times, but also opened up for some great viewing. We also were able to see a nice sunset, several shooting stars, Saturn, double stars, another galaxy, Vega, and more. This was the second year that we have done this and we hope to make it an annual October event! Thanks to all the FFLA volunteers who helped out!

Goodnow: From SUNY ESF: *"The tower repair project has been fully approved by the state and should now move forward!"* This is great news! We look forward to hearing more from ESF soon.

Leonard Hill: From NYSDEC: *"We have a scope of work and a cost estimate for the tower rehab. Work will likely commence next summer, as the contractor has been tied up working on another tower."* This is also great news and we look forward to seeing this structure restored and having a steward presence there.

St. Regis: “Three volunteers from the Friends of St. Regis Mountain Fire Tower mounted another panoramic panel in the tower cab. Visitors to the tower can use the labels on the panels to identify the features they are viewing. The new north view panel is the fourth one to be installed. The south and east views were placed three years ago and the west view was put up last month. The two new panels are professionally crafted and are expected to last ten or more years in the harsh summit environment. Next year the original two panels will be replaced with new professionally manufactured plates. The heavy panels and all the tools needed to install them were packed to the top of the mountain by the volunteers. Precise marking and drilling are required to secure the panels to the tower. Using the proper safety equipment, one person works outside of the cab while two others work inside. The work is challenging and physically demanding, but extremely rewarding.” Thank you to all who worked on this! Photos from the Friends group.



Bramley: As promised last month, we were going to share more good news on the return of this original tower to the summit, in its original location. Footings were completed, inspected, cured and the tower began to rise up since our last newsletter. This 80 foot Aeromotor Tower is being redone by Mike V. and the crew of Excelsior Towers. <https://excelsiorfiretowers.com>. The Friends of Bramley Mt. and the FFLA were able to assist the crew with getting some materials to the summit, no small feat! A lovely weather window allowed construction to proceed for several days before having to take a break.



Crane: About 30 years ago, Perky and Dick saved the Crane Mt. Fire Tower Cab from being sold as scrap metal. They moved it to Martin's Lumber in time to be seen during the Thurman Fall Farm Tour on Oct. 12. Come sign the new register and check names on the original one from 1920. <https://www.stories-from-open-space.org/trip-reports/remembering-the-crane-mountain-fire-tower>

Remembering those behind the scenes: Our condolences to Retired Forest Ranger Paul Hartmann who lost his wife Alice recently. Alice was not only a Ranger's wife, but also played a role of her own with the DEC from 1974 until her "retirement" in 1995. During her tenure at Little Falls, she not only worked as a nurse, but also served as a radio dispatcher, nights and weekends, for the Forest Rangers in the western and southern Adirondacks." Paul and Alice were married for 45 yrs. <https://chapmanmoser.com/tribute/details/5234/Alice-Hartmann/obituary.html#tribute-start>

AROUND THE COUNTRY

A Zamboni? Yes, that's right, a Zamboni. What does that have to do with wildland fires and tower? Check out this article to find out: <https://www.eastbaytimes.com/2024/09/10/a-zamboni-for-wildfire-prevention-mobile-burn-chamber-could-change-the-game/>

Annual FFLA Calendar Contest: Requests have been made to submit your photo(s) for this annual contest. Winners will be posted and included in the 2025 calendar. Let's make sure New York has a photo or two in this contest! Please go to the Forest Fire Lookout Association (FFLA) Facebook page for all of the details.

2025 Conferences: It is confirmed that the NYS Chapter will be hosting the 2025 Northeastern Conference. Stay tuned for save the date information and more details.

STEWARDSHIP

Sometimes stewards are volunteer, sometimes paid. The Friends of Poke O Moonshine were able to hire a steward and she shares her summer experience: From Steward Emmaline: *"The 2024 summer on the mountain was filled with sun, camp visits, and cloudy summit mornings. The weather was variable: very hot humid days produced large thunderheads over Whiteface, that made their way over to Poke-O. For two weeks, the summit was choked in the smoke from the wildfires out west and in Canada. It was eerie to watch haze roll over the mountains and turn the sky orange. One of my favorite things to do on a clear day was bird watch vultures, rose-breasted grosbeaks, chatty bluejays eating blueberries, ravens playing in the wind, and three peregrine falcons! One morning, I saw a ruffed grouse with her chicks, not happy to see me and flying toward me with one wing bent in defense of the chicks. My biggest joy was teaching hikers about the geological, ecological, and indigenous history of the Adirondacks, because I would see a difference in their perspective on the area, as they became more mindful of this place. Visitors from the UK, Ireland, and New Zealand all described how their countries look nothing like this one, that they are less wild and more commercial, so their time in the Adirondacks was a breath of fresh air."* Thanks Emmaline. In addition, a new fire tower map was fabricated and reinstalled at the fire tower after the theft of the old map. Thanks to DEC Forester Dan Levy and Friends Volunteer Mark Robinson.

Visits: Returning from the broken ankle has me scrambling to get in outdoor time and what better place than fire towers! Visits this month include: Berry Hill, Kane, Utsayantha, Georgetown site, Morgan Hill site, Bramley, Dickinson Hill, and Beebe Hill.

HISTORY

Cornell Hill Fire Tower turned 100 this year! Or was it last year? We have some differing accounts and we suspect that like many towers, it is possible that it was built one year and became operational the following year. Phone lines needed to be built along with the tower and Observers needed to be hired. This was not always accomplished in the same year. The FFLA Collection of Conservation Commission reports contains a 1923 volume, but not a 1924 volume. In the 1923 volume it includes this passage on page 151 under the Division of Lands and Forests, Forest Fire Prevention: “*The Board of Supervisors of Saratoga County, early in the year, appropriated the sum of \$1000.00 to be used for the establishment of a fire observation station on Cornell Hill located about 2 miles southeast of Saratoga Lake. Additional funds were contributed by a local landowner to defray the expense of putting up the tower and building the necessary phone line. This station was completed in the fall but was not manned. It will however be ready for use in the spring of 1924.*”

The next entry in the report is about the Causes of Forest Fires in 1923, which totaled 236. The top causes were; Smokers (72), Locomotives (55), Burning brush (53), Campers (14) Children (11) and Hunters (7). All man made causes.

A nice looking cabin was built for the Observer. The first to staff the tower was Noah LaCasse in May of 1924 through November of 1935. Noah earned \$90.20 per month for his expertise. We wrote a bit about him in a previous newsletter and his role in presidential history. 7 other Observers would work at the Cornell Hill tower before its closure. The last to work at the tower was Jim Crammond (April 1957 to November 1970), whose nephew Richard shares; “*When I was a young pup, early sixties, my Uncle Jim would pick me up at home so I could stay the weekend and spend some time with him and Aunt Olie, his common law wife at the Cornell Tower for Luther's Forest. What a peaceful place for a while. Good sand for my toy trucks to make roads. me with my chips and soda at that little table all to myself in the corner, I was a happy camper for sure. One day we got stuck halfway in to the tower on that dirt and mudhole road. I can still here my Uncle yelling at me and Aunt Olie, 'push, push, push damn it all'.*”

Later it was noted that fires were numerous in the area when the Northway was being built. Thousands of trees were cut and much slash existed. The Northway was a 10 year project that began in 1957 and was completed in 1967. Cornell Hill fire tower was closed at the end of the 1970 season.

The tower languished where it stood, unoccupied and unused, but Larry Gordon thought it could be saved. In 2008 the tower was taken down and moved to the Wilton Wildlife Management area. Under the thoughtful guidance of Larry and with assistance from Davana LLC, the tower was returned to an upright position in 2010 in some extremely cold temperatures. The FFLA was there to assist and see it happening. We have numerous photographs of that on our website and we encourage you to visit there: www.nysffla.org – click on the history button – click on pictures – click on the Paul Hartmann collection – then click on Cornell Hill.

Today, the Town of Wilton maintains a website that includes the days and hours the tower is open. They are currently seeking volunteers to keep their program going in 2025. Please consider helping them out. <https://townofwilton.com/visitors/cornell-hill-fire-tower/>

Photos on the next page, courtesy of Paul Hartmann collection, the cabin undated, the tower in 1924 and Dave Vana and Larry Gordon 2010.



LIGHTING 2024, CONTINUED

Many activities occurred around the lighting event, creating that perfect connection between community and fire towers once again!

In Stamford, a local business, Catskill Junction, held a viewing party: *“We will be holding a viewing party of the Mt. Utsayantha lighting at our location here in Stamford. We have unobstructed views from our business that we will be keeping open late and inviting the community to bring flashlights and sing along around the campfire with local musician, Bobby Curious. We will read the Observer's names as part of our celebration.”*

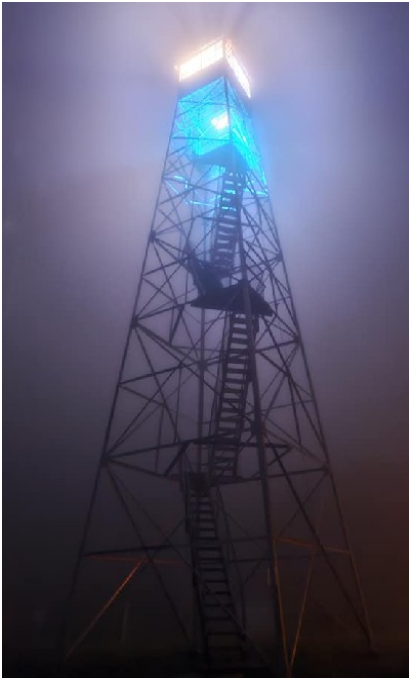
From Lake Clear: *“Last night, Saturday 8/31/24, Hohmeyer's Lake Clear Lodge & Resort and the Friends of St. Regis Mt. Fire Tower enjoyed their 7th annual Lighting of the Fire Tower dinner and fundraiser. The festivities were enjoyed by many tower supporters. After the delicious meal, Friends group chairperson Doug presented a slideshow. Then Ernest of the LCL and board member Bob drew raffle tickets for the many prizes supplied by the Lodge, FOSRMFT and homemade gifts from Bob and Doug. A BIG thank you to all the attendees, and especially to the Hohmeyers and their exceptional staff. Find your favorite spot to view the tower on Sunday and celebrate with us the many observers who kept a watchful eye over the forests of the Adirondack and the Catskill Mountains.”*

Another activity that we knew nothing about until we received a request to adjust the lighting time: *“Every year we drive around to spot as many towers lit as we can. This year we spotted Goodnow, Buck, Blue, and could have also gotten Owl's Head but no light this year.”* I guess we have certainly connected with these folks! Speaking of adjusting the time of our lighting event, every year we (the Executive Committee) meet and discuss what worked well and what did not soon after the event. In 2025 the Lighting event will be held on Saturday, August 30th from 8:30pm to 9:30pm a full hour. Don't worry, we will remind all of the change leading up to the date in 2025.

Our friends at National Woodlands introduced a great piece done by NPR on the lighting this way: [Into the Woods: Fire Towers in New York are Illuminated to Honor Fire Watchers.](#)

“The words of this next story can put a picture in your head - the image of standing in a high tower, an old fire tower looking out over the woods in New York's Adirondack and Catskill Parks. Every year, people light up these towers like lighthouses to honor fire watchers. NPR's Brian Mann went along.”

<https://www.npr.org/2024/09/05/nx-s1-5092072/ny-fire-tower-illumination>



Utsayantha by Brandy Reed



St. Regis from Friends group



Blue by F. R. Jason Scott



Overlook by Beth MacDonald



Berry Hill by Warren Johnsen



Poke O by Max Constant

CALENDAR

October 26th, 2024: The upper section of Spruce Mt Fire Tower Trail will closed for hunting season.

Saturday, Nov 2nd 2024: Poke O Moonshine Fall Trail Raking. Meet at 9:30am at the campground/ Ranger Trailhead. For trail work days, please bring work gloves, iron or grass rake, hoe, sufficient food and liquid to fuel yourself for 3-5 hours, non-cotton clothing in layers so you can peel down as you warm up. Sign up by contacting Mark Robinson, their Trails Coordinator, at 518-578-1480

Happy Halloween! Don't let any fire towers frighten you! Laurie/www.nysffla.org