



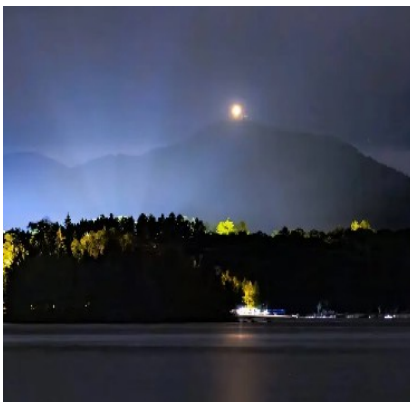
**Forest Fire Lookout Association  
New York State Chapter  
September 2024**

Late August and early September have nearly come and gone, a very busy time here in New York. September features our annual Lighting Event, but it is also a time of year when we begin to wrap up our volunteer work projects and our volunteer steward programs. It can also be a time of huge visitor numbers. New York's fall foliage is spectacular and if you want to have a spectacular view, what better place than a fire tower view.

A huge shout out of thanks goes to the volunteers who gave of their time to illuminate each tower, which involves a great deal more than flipping a switch from off to on. Each of these Illuminators had to inform their local areas and the press about the event. Many recruited area businesses to hold events in connection with the lighting. They had to gather together the necessary lights, batteries and fasteners. In some cases they could borrow items or already owned them and in some cases these selfless volunteers are purchasing items just for this event. They must also gather together a team of people who will assist them in carrying all these items to the top of the tower. Many of these carries involve several miles of trail. Then they had to place the lights, to do the actual lighting and then remove all traces of the event having taken place (not easy on a dark tower), walk out in the darkness, share photos, and report in that they were off the mountain safely. Quite a few tasks and in some cases their teams were very small.

Adding to this years planning was what to do about the weather. Checking the forecast all week and watching it deteriorate was disheartening. But by Thursday morning, a call needed to be made. We looked at the forecast around all areas of the state and generally found that Saturday forecasts were calling for about a 70% chance of rain and Sunday for about a 25% chance of rain, so Sunday it was. Unfortunately due to this date change, we lost some Illuminators who were not able to accommodate the new date. But the Illuminators did a great job of getting the word out about the new date and informing the public and the press of the date change. Sunday found various types of weather, some deluges during the hike to the tower, some rain during the lighting, some areas of dense fog, and a few with clear skies and lovely stars.

But persevere these hearty folks did. Many, many thanks for making this event a success! Here are a few photos from afar as the event is meant to connect with communities.\*



Goodnow by William Adamczak



Adams by Kenmore



Kane by K. Alice Lindsay

Retired Forest Ranger Gary Lee wrote in his weekly column about the Lighting Event in the days leading up to it: <https://www.adirondackalmanack.com/2024/08/annual-lighting-of-fire-towers-set-for-aug-31.html> Though retired, Gary always provides a word about safety “*Locally, we will be lighting up the fire towers in the area on Aug. 31 from 9 to 9:30 p.m. and reading the names of the observers that manned those towers in remembrance of their service. Bald Mountain (Rondaxe), Woodhull, Wakely, Owlshhead, Stillwater and Snowy mountains will be lit that night. Some lighting can be viewed from the local lakes and highways. I know some people go up to these towers that are lit before sunset to take photos, but you better take a good headlamp or two with you because it is completely dark coming back down after the lighting takes place.*”

A special comment on Gary's column comes from Retired Forest Ranger and Author, Lou Curth, “*Thanks Gary for reminding us about the Aug. 31 fire tower lighting event and those men and women who were so much a part of our forest ranger organization all those years. Those dedicated Observers warned us of suspicious smokes on the horizon, but they also had another, equally important, job as mountain top greeters and educators for generations of hikers and recreational users of our public lands.*”

*The failure of DEC to place a realistic monetary value upon the educational role of both the fire tower observers and the rangers was an unfortunate decision with consequences that continue to extend far beyond the arbitrary closure of so many of our fire towers.*

*Please put this year’s August 31st fire tower lighting on your calendar as an occasion to pause and remember.”*

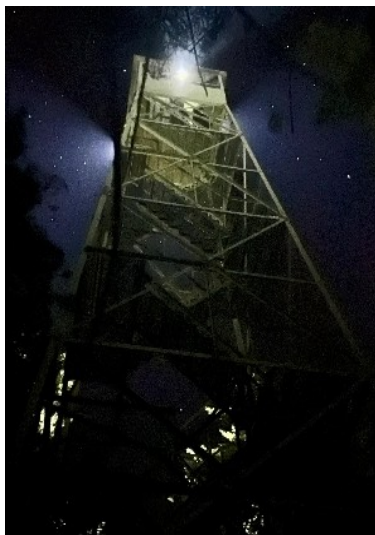
The following week, Gary highlighted the event once again, “*It was nice that three of the grandchildren got to do the hike up and tower lighting on Woodhull Mountain. The rain stopped just before we went up the mountain and there was a visitor up there who had walked in, the first one ever to be there. Nice sunset with big puffy white clouds on the horizon, not much to be seen to the east as the rainstorm moved in that direction, but I know some of the towers over that way were lit as I got photos of them covered with lights.*”

Our sincere condolences to Gary at this time who with the support of his family, lit Woodhull despite having just lost his wife of 60 years, Karen. May the view from a tower help your healing.

Woodhull Gary by Lee



Buck by Caroline Crebs



Stillwater by R. H. Spiros



## AROUND THE STATE

**Utsayantha:** As part of the Annual Lighting Event activities, the Village of Stamford Historian, Karen Cuccinello, gave a great presentation on Utsayantha, the history of the mountain, how it got its name, the various buildings and businesses that once were part of the summit, as well as the fire tower on August 21st. It was a very interesting and thorough look at this lovely western Catskill Mountaintop and a great way to kick off the Lighting event there! We appreciate the time and effort Karen took to put this together. As always, we can all learn something new everyday and based on this presentation I have something new to look for on my next visit! Thanks Karen!

**Swede:** From Dean Moore, Director for Warren County Parks, Recreation and Railroad: *“I would like to thank the FFLA for the support to restore the Swede Mountain Fire Tower. The \$500 grant award was used to purchase a roof panel to replace the section that was missing. The roof panel was installed just in time for the 11th Annual Lighting of the Fire Towers event. I would also like to share with you, that with the support of our partners at the Warren County Soil and Water Conservation District, we were able to add interpretive panels for identifying the mountain peaks that can be viewed from the tower. We look forward to the opportunity to team up again for future projects to maintain and improve the Swede Mountain Fire Tower.”*

**St. Regis:** The Friends of St. Regis have been very busy. We have so much to share that it is already spilling over into next month's newsletter. But for now, an update from August 22<sup>nd</sup>, *“Board members Jack B. and Rich were on the summit yesterday to install another panoramic panel showing and naming the mountains and water seen in the view shed. We hiked up the lake trail (thank you Karen for the use of your boat). There are several large trees down and several areas with significant water on that section of trail. The main trail was mostly dry. The installation – as with most jobs on the mountain – had its low moments and very high moments. No matter how much you plan a project, once up there you realize the job isn't as easy as imagined. However, the job always gets accomplished! This time a wonderful Smitty student by the name of Matt appeared and helped finish the job in quick fashion. We also had several very nice hikers visit us. There was a couple from Italy traveling the States on their honeymoon who brought their love to our tower! Tabby, a USR lake resident, is a frequent visitor. Later on Tabby sent a very nice text: 'thank you for all the hard work you have put into bringing the tower back to life. I know you've given everyone on the lake a little piece of their childhood soul back. We all cherish the tower!'. Photos courtesy of Friends of St. Regis.*



**Mt. Arab:** A notice to all Mt. Arab hikers from F.O.M.A.: *“Please be aware, the railroad tracks crossing the road to the Mt Arab trailhead are again active, especially on weekends and Sunday in particular. Please be sure to stop in your vehicle at the railroad crossing STOP sign and listen and look for trains.”*

**Lyon Mt.:** On Sunday, September 22<sup>nd</sup> a group of 4 hearty volunteers; Pete, Norm, and Angell, with Adam as their leader, tackled some much needed work at Lyon Mt. Fire Tower. New steps needed to be put in place to replace some broken and cracked ones and new safety fencing as well. They carried the fencing to the top as well as all of the tools that were required to do the work and did water bar clearing and some minor blowdown removal! Many thanks for this huge piece of work! Photos courtesy of Pete who says *“Perfect working conditions; bug-free, no wind, partial sun, low to mid 70s. Trail was dry.”*



**Bramley:** A lot has been happening at the Bramley Mountain Fire Tower site. There will be a much larger story next month. Hint – steel is being moved, concrete is being poured. Hmm, what could it be?

Ranger Reports illustrate how busy the Rangers have been lately with several rescues on fire tower trails. The following are quotes from the Reports:

**8-27-24: Hamlet of Gabriels, Franklin County, Wilderness Rescue:** On Aug. 20th at 11:50 PM, Ray Brook Dispatch received a call from a hiker on St. Regis Mountain who was running out of light and cell phone battery life. Coordinates placed the 74-year-old from Brookhaven approximately ¼ mile from the trailhead before the call dropped. Forest Ranger DuChene hiked in, located the subject, and helped him back to his vehicle at the trailhead. Resources were clear at 1:40 AM.

**9-4-24: Town of Webb, Herkimer County, Wilderness Rescue:** On Sept. 1 at 2 PM, Ray Brook Dispatch received a call about a hiker on Bald Mountain with a possible cardiac issue. The 68-year-old from Brewerton had a history of cardiac events. An off-duty paramedic and nurse were with the hiker. Forest Rangers Bills, McCartney, and Pelrah reached the subject and helped him back to the trailhead to a waiting ambulance. Resources were clear at 3:57 PM.

9-5-24: **Town of Woodstock, Ulster County, Wilderness Rescue:** On Sept. 1 at 3 PM, a camper at Echo Lake reported his brother had suffered a back injury and could not walk out on his own. Five Forest Rangers and the Woodstock Fire Department made it to the lake by 6 PM. They packaged the subject into a wheeled litter and transported him to a fire department UTV. The fire department drove the subject to a Woodstock ambulance. Resources were clear at 9:15 PM.

9-10 **Town of Piercefield, St. Lawrence County, Wilderness Search:** On Sept. 4 at 10 PM, New York State Police was notified about a missing hiker on the Mount Arab trail. Forest Rangers Benzel and Corey interviewed the missing subject's hiking companion who said the pair became separated on the way down the trail. At 11:15 PM, Ranger Corey located the 45-year-old from Croghan. Rangers Corey and Ellis assisted the subject to an ambulance at the trailhead. Piercefield EMS warned the subject and released her back to her hiking partner. Resources were clear at 12:32 AM.

And one very interesting Fire was part of the report:

9-5-24: **Town of Harrietstown, Franklin County, Wildland Fire and Law Enforcement:** On Aug. 27 at 8:19 PM, Ray Brook Dispatch received a call about an out-of-control campfire on Lower Saranac Lake campground. Saranac Lake Fire Department and two Forest Rangers responded. By 12:45 AM, the fire department extinguished the approximately 50-foot-by-50-foot fire. The responsible party, accompanied by two other people, used gasoline to start the fire in a fire ring, but the fire quickly burned outside the ring's perimeter. The three subjects left the island in their boat to avoid getting burned. Rangers issued two tickets to the 28-year-old responsible for starting the fire due to not clearing three feet from the fire ring and not having enough personal floatation devices in a boat. Rangers brought the party back to clean up their belongings and evicted the trio from the campground.

## STEWARDSHIP

Our volunteer stewards come from all walks of life and bring a variety of talents with them. Some of them even steward at more than one tower. Such is the case with Steward Dan Z., who not only has helped us out for a few years, but has also helped us out at more than one tower. In addition to being a busy Dad and husband, he likes to record a bit about his work for Youtube. Check out what he has to say about being a steward! Many thanks to Dan for giving of us his time!

A Day as a Fire Tower Steward: Kane - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tXi5VubnzAc>

A Day as a Fire Tower Steward: Dickinson Hill - [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h9\\_f-d43J58](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h9_f-d43J58)

## AROUND THE COUNTRY

We continue to keep an eye on the numerous wildfires in the western U.S., particularly in California, where some disturbing information is coming regarding the reasons for them. While one would think that wet winters like the ones California have had recently would help to promote plant growth and make fire danger less, it seems just the opposite. In dry years, the plant material is so dry that a lot of it dies, leaving less fuel during times of fire. In a wet year, there is more plant material that eventually dries out in the stifling California heat and thus, it creates more fuel in times of high fire danger. And in addition to that, the Santa Anna winds have not even started up yet this year. Read more about the concerns of some in this article: <https://www.cnn.com/2024/09/22/weather/california-wildfire-outlook/index.html> We sincerely hope that all who are involved in these fires stay safe.

\*We will continue to share lighting information throughout the next several newsletters for all to enjoy.

## HISTORY

Bill Tindall, son of Observer George Tindall who served at Kempshall Fire Tower from 1952 to 1955 provided us with some great follow up to our connection to aviation. Bill writes, "*Planes in early 50's. Herb Helmes provided float plane service, mostly tourist scenic trips, out of Long Lake, NY. Occasionally, he flew to support the fire towers by providing close inspection of a remote fire that had been spotted from a tower. On one memorable occasion we were in town for supplies. I was down by the bridge when I saw my father running down the street toward me. "Want to go for a plane ride", he asked. I had watched Helms take off, land, circle our tower many times but never had occasion for a plane ride. We flew straight up the lake to the outlet where a serious fire was brewing, the notable "Cold River Fire". The situation was assessed and we returned to town to begin what became an all hands on deck effort to put out this fire. It was a potentially dangerous fire, for if it climbed the mountain flank and got into the blow down from the Hurricane of the early 50's it would have been unstoppable.*

*It was headed for what had been a stand of old growth white pine of magnificent size that was flattened by the hurricane. From Kempshall Mt., this former stand looked like the game 'Pick Up Sticks'. It was thought if the fire reached this point it would race to Tupper Lake. My cousin was working at a camp on Long Lake. He and many others were drafted to fight the fire. My father was radio relay from fire crew to Long Lake Office. Dad got a letter (which I have) from state commending him on his service, which was many hours without sleep. If I recall correctly, the State was able to eventually push a road to the fire, otherwise it was only accessible by boat. As I recall, rain saved the day. According to a cousin, getting water to the fire from the river was the main challenge. Getting pumps to the location was difficult." Photo from Tindall's 1952. Thanks for sharing these great memories with us Bill!*



## ANNOUNCEMENTS / CALENDAR / CLOSURES / CAUTIONS

**Vanderwhacker Mountain WF Moose Pond Club Road Closure:** From August 28<sup>th</sup> through early October, this route, including the trail to Vanderwhacker Mountain, is closed to all vehicle, pedestrian and bike traffic during a bridge construction project. Please visit our website for all closures and notices: <http://www.nysffla.org>

**Pillsbury:** 9-20-24: Jessup River Wild Forest Fire Tower Debris: Pillsbury Mountain Fire Tower Observer's Cabin has had one of the walls collapse. Debris from the wall has fallen into the trail leading to the fire tower. Hikers coming to visit the tower should be cautious of nails and broken remnants of the wall and try to walk on the boards that have been placed down. DEC staff will work to clean up the debris. A harbinger of things to come for other cabins like Vandewhacker and Balsam Lake?

Laurie