

FFLA Newsletter, New York Chapter

February 2016

Brrrrr winter in New York at last – this past weekend's daytime temperatures stayed below zero in the North Country and with wind chills much below zero – now that is more like what we expect! We still have quite a snow drought going on in the state though. Not only is this not good for businesses that cater to winter sports such as skiing and snowmobiling, but this snow drought may well lead to a busy fire season come spring. Those big fires that occurred last May on Hunter Mt, Roosa Gap, and near Schroon Lake may have been just a small sample of what is to come! I read an interesting article written by Robin Wall Kimmerer, a Professor at SUNY ESF entitled, The Legacy of Fire in the April 2016 issue of Adirondack Life magazine. She describes the mature, undisturbed Adirondack forest as “the asbestos forest” with low flammability. She references 4 old fires and 3 of those 4 had drought as a contributing factor. Let's keep our fingers crossed for a rainy spring.

Trivia Question from January - *What year do you believe those first cabins were built in New York State?* - I did not get any specific responses from anyone as to the year. I am not certain if we can accurately answer that question either. Many Observers built tents or stone huts to protect themselves from the elements long before it was specified that there must be a cabin. I have seen photos of a tent on Whiteface that was dated 1909, but there may well have been others even earlier than that. Let's be realistic, there were likely many shelters of some sort built on mountain tops so that an Observer could seek some type of shelter during inclement weather.

The first standard design for observers cabins was developed in 1922 – thanks to retired Forest Ranger Paul Hartmann for his research regarding this. The requirement was put in place to furnish livable quarters where Observers were required to remain continuously on duty. Previously many cabins were small and less than ideal or safe.

February Trivia Question: So let's try a more specific question for this month's trivia. What size were these first standard cabins required to be? An FFLA sticker goes to the first person with the correct answer!

Bill Tindall, who's Dad George was the Observer on Kempshall Mountain recalls the cabin from his perspective during the years of 1953 and 1954. “The cabin was two rooms. The front room was the bedroom and office. It had a bed, stove and desk. There was also a wall map of the Adirondacks. The back room was the kitchen, with a cook stove and table and two chairs. There was a stove for heating in the front room of the cabin. It took large balsam logs. The cook stove in the kitchen was fueled with split white birch. We hauled almost all the food up the mountain. Occasionally we killed a rabbit and that was good fresh meat. For lunch I ate many peanut butter sandwiches with peanut butter and anything else I could find on them, even grapes when we hauled fresh grapes up from town. The bread was usually stale. For dinner we had something out of a can. I particularly liked canned potatoes but I liked fresh rabbit best.” Thanks so very much for sharing your memories Bill!

As Bill Tindall and I corresponded, he spoke of the Ranger who worked with his Dad, Percy Stanton. Percy went so far as to arrange a surprise birthday gift for his Dad on Kempshall – a freshly baked pie! Another great example of being part of a fire tower family! A recent article about one of the Adirondack's most famous Forest Rangers was in interesting read:

<http://www.lakeplacid.com/blog/2016/01/peter-fish-adirondack-forest-ranger>

History/Who has a birthday this year? Yes, we are looking at those centennial celebrations. In 1916 steel towers were erected on Makomis, Cathead, Hamilton, T-Lake, Tomany, Wakely, Moosehead, Fort Noble, and Woodhull mountains. Of those 9 towers, 2 remain standing and accessible to the public on Wakely and Woodhull. Cathead remains standing but access is closed due to a land dispute between a private party and the State. A hiker who recently visited Hamilton's now very wooded summit area reported only a single footing remained – photos attached courtesy of NYSDEC, Paul Hartmann (1976), and James Hopson (2016).

Preserving History: The men and women who were Observers and Forest Rangers proudly wore their uniforms. How best to preserve and display same? Here is one suggestion - take a dress uniform and utilize it to make a soft photo frame to display the badge and pins. What do you think? Photo attached courtesy of Betty Baker.

Organizing a Friends Group: This process simply starts with someone who cares. That someone speaks to friends, family and acquaintances about their concerns. Those people begin to offer some constructive ideas and often a willingness to provide some expertise or sweat equity. Often these ideas and offers of help occur over a beverage, around some food, or on a hike. Before you know it, the original someone who cares is surrounded by a Friends Group! Among the friends, family and acquaintances you are likely to find someone who is a leader, an organizer, an IT person, a fund raiser, a builder, a liaison, someone who can cook (always important to keep the group well fed), someone who is creative, a good problem solver, civic minded, loves research and history – and there you have it – a Friends Group. And you are Keeping it Local! So talk up your concerns for a fire tower in your area that needs a little love. If you would like some help in organizing a Friends Group, please let me know.

Updates/ Help Needed: I have had some concerns/suggestions from people regarding the need for restoration/repair/upkeep for Lyon Mt, Loon Lake, and Leonard Hill. Start talking to friends, family and acquaintances if you share concerns for these historic structures. Please get in touch with me and we'll get a Friends Group going!

SAVE THE DATE

The weekend of September 17th and 18th 2016 the NYS Chapter of the FFLA will be hosting the Northeastern Conference in the Adirondacks. Quite a bit of progress was made this past month regarding plans for the programs and fire tower visits. I think we shall have a pretty firm schedule put together by next month's newsletter. Please stay tuned for more details and keep that weekend open! If you have a suggestion or would like to help out, please let me know.

Your feedback is always encouraged and welcomed. Remember keeping it local means being certain your NYS FFLA Annual membership dues are paid. Not a member? Please consider joining. You can do so on line at <http://www.firelookout.org/index.html>

Only 30 days until Spring – start planning your work on those fire tower projects now. For now, stay warm and safe!

Laurie Rankin, Director NYS FFLA

