

# FFLA Newsletter – New York Chapter

June 2016

**Wildfires:** Last month New York wild fires were the lead in the newsletter. Since then, the trees have leaved out and the forest floor has greened up. This allows the vegetation to retain some moisture and the danger of wildfires has dropped dramatically. We are still finding things pretty dry, so this reprieve may be short lived. However, this drop in fire danger is not the case for other areas.

The nightly national news has been filled with wild fire headlines in the last month, from the tragedies in Fort McMurray in Manitoba to the southwestern United States. Red Flag warnings have been issued, with low humidity, winds and record heat making fire fighting efforts difficult. One thing I do find oddly “beneficial” about these fires is that they are making nightly news headlines. It helps the general public understand the significance of large wild fires and the role that fire towers can play in early detection and fighting fires. It makes explaining the purpose of the fire towers of New York State a bit easier when you can ask someone if they saw the news last night and explain that towns in the Adirondacks were once like Fort McMurray.

I have been corresponding with Dixie who mans a lookout tower in New Mexico. She is working on writing a book and will be including New York information in her book. Dixie turned in the Dog Head fire. When she came down for water and supplies a few days ago she sent me a quick update and it sounds like things are still touch and go. This link is from 3 days ago: <http://krqe.com/2016/06/17/dog-head-fire-crews-attempt-to-contain-fire/> and this one from today: <http://krqe.com/2016/06/20/dog-head-fire-fire-lines-hold-steady-evacuation-areas-still-too-hot/>. Thoughts and prayers to all our fellow Observers/Lookouts, the fire fighters and all others who are working so hard to combat these wildfires.

**Trivia Question from May:** I have to send an FFLA sticker to Ed Engleman and Bob Spear who sent along this information about other means of communication between towers and from towers – cow horns, school bells, mirror flashes, semaphore flags and church bells: *The Protection of Woodlands Against Dangers Arising from Organic and Inorganic Causes* by Hermann Furst, Director of the Bavarian Forest Institute of Aschaffenburg and translated by John Nisbet of the Indian Forest Service, author of “*British Forest Trees, and their Silvicultural Characteristics and Treatment.*” dated 1893 Page 238-9: *As it is of very great importance to have speedy information with regard to the occurrence of any forest fire, so that measures for its extinction may be taken at once, special watchers should be maintained in coniferous forests on the plains whenever there is long, continuous drought in spring or summer, and signals should be preconcerted in order to call together whatever body of men is available for the purpose of taking measures to counteract its spread and to accomplish its extinction. In the North German plain watch-towers are erected of wood, and cow-horns are blown from these as soon as any suspicious smoke is seen, whilst the church bells ring a continuous alarm, and a red flag is run up to the top of the spire to call the attention of the general population to the matter.*

And from Bob Spear: *Some earlier methods of communication before radio, between towers was using a “mirror-flash” apparatus called a “heliograph” it consisted of a tripod mounted dual mirror and “shutter” system for sending coded messages. The operators developed their own “Flash Code system, similar to Morse Code used by telegraphs. Of course it only worked on sunny days ! This was mostly a Western method used on Lookouts there on High peaks. Semaphore flags were sometimes used from towers which meant operators had to have pretty darn good eyesight to make them out with binoculars of the day! Telegraph keyed systems were more sophisticated but required expensive equipment, steel*

*wires etc, and when the first magneto-cranked telephones came into use, the modern age was born! In the earliest of days of course there were no communications at all, and a fire lookout had to also be a "smoke-chaser" making his way to a fire scene the best way possible and hopefully finding others along the way to help out! Rural mail-carriers often were utilized to spread the word of a fire in the area, or ringing the local School bell to alert farmers to a problem.*

**Trivia Question for June:** I'm going to throw out a couple of questions this month. What fire tower is currently located at the highest elevation in New York State? Historically, which fire tower was at the highest elevation in New York State? Which fire tower was the tallest tower in New York State? Is it still standing? The winner will get an FFLA sticker!

I had the pleasure of visiting several fire tower sites since last month, meeting some more of you in my travels, actually helping with some work on fire towers, planning the new facebook page, reading the Spring 2016 Lookout Network issue, welcoming new members, and making some more plans for the upcoming Northeastern Conference to be held in September. While each of these was an important visit or task to complete, one of my favorites was the chance to visit with **David Vana of Davana Fire Tower Restoration**.

David graciously invited my husband and I to stop in and see the fire towers that he currently has for sale, his latest projects and to discuss his role in our upcoming Northeastern Conference in September. David was such a wealth of information. He has been instrumental in several New York fire tower repairs and renovations. David assisted with the Mount Beacon project, the Azure Mountain project, Cornell Hill fire tower and others. He was making a new roof for the St. Regis fire tower the day after we visited. He travels all across the country to build, rebuild and restore fire towers. He understands the unique challenges that taking down, moving and re-erecting a fire tower involves. If you need a bolt or a new tower, David is the one to contact. David has several fire towers for sale. A complete list of those fire towers are on page 17 of the Spring issue of the 'Lookout Network' magazine. He recently designed and built a cab that can be rapidly disassembled and reassembled. It is a unique structure that you could live in! David will speak about the Cornell Hill fire tower project at our conference, share some of those unique challenges he has encountered and answer your questions.

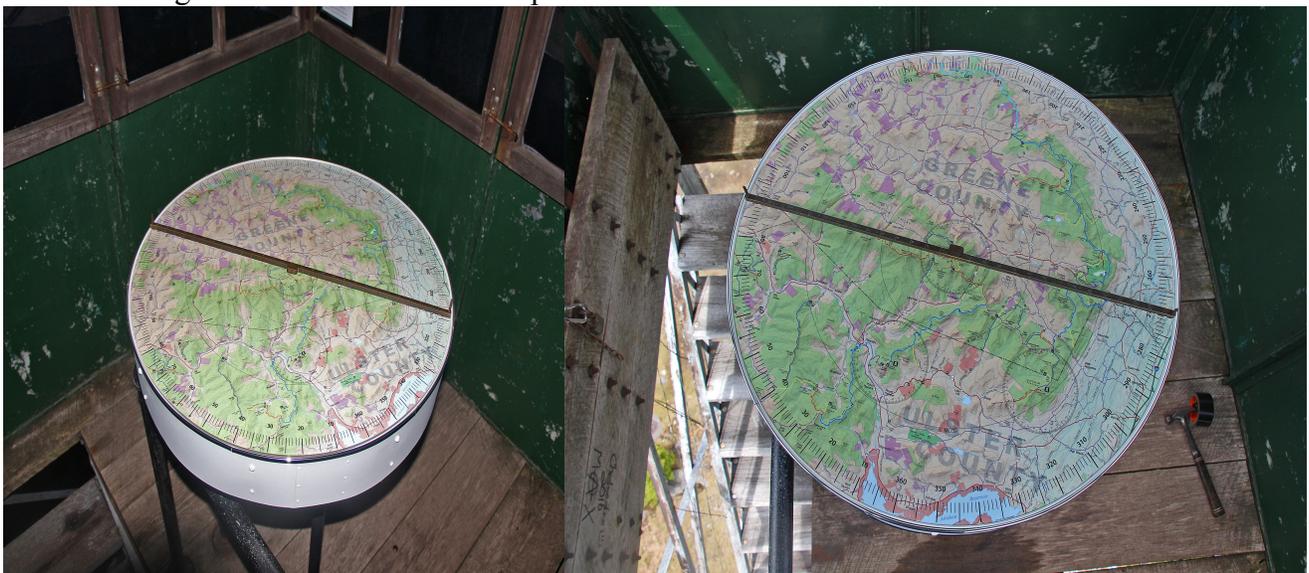
**Facebook Page** to go live June 21<sup>st</sup>! With all of the credit going to my husband Tom for his work on this, we will go live with our **FFLA New York State Chapter Facebook Group**. The link is: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1736798186564272/>. **Please plan on liking us** and we in turn will like your individual group pages. This will allow several different audiences to see one another and promote NY fire towers. These folks may be like minded individuals with a passion for fire towers or they may enjoy history or hiking. All are welcome and will be great contributors! Sharing of photos is something that I hope works well in this manner too. Please feel free to offer comments as well.

In the Spring issue of the 'Lookout Network' was a link to something that may be great fun to watch. Make some popcorn and settle in for a retro showing of a **1961 Lassie** episode where Lassie helps build a fire break while his human companions help out in the fire tower: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CTTcAiYOKki>

**Updates from around the state** are numerous with hundreds of volunteer hours worked by dozens of people. Many fire towers opened on Memorial Day weekend with a summit steward at the tower to greet visitors and explain the history of the tower, as well as the surrounding area.

**Hurricane:** On June 7<sup>th</sup>, I got to meet several of the folks involved with the Hurricane Mountain Fire Tower project. Peter Slocum and Kathleen Blaisel had organized a group of volunteers who will be greeting visitors at the summit on July, August, and September weekends. The role of the volunteer summit steward is to greet hikers, and provide educational information about the landmark geography, history, and restoration of the fire tower. There were nine volunteers who gave up a day for a training class with Julia Goren, Environmental Educator for the Adirondack Mountain Club and Jim Giglinto, New York State Forest Ranger. We thank Julia and Jim for their expertise and time. Thanks to all of the volunteers who came and participated in the class. You have a great group there Peter and Kathleen!

**Hunter Mountain:** Memorial Day weekend Hunter Mountain fire tower volunteer John Slechta installed a new map in the tower. It is a wonderful addition to the experience at Hunter Mountain and hikers who saw the map were truly awed by it! The level of detail in the map and the local features that were included make this alidade map a unique asset! The map was created by Liz Cruz and we can't thank her enough for all of her time and expertise!



**Poke O Moonshine:** Kyle Pendell is this year's Summer Steward at Poke O Moonshine. He is a student at SUNY Potsdam, studying Environmental Sciences and this is his internship for the summer. Kyle's host family where he will be staying is Cindy and Brian Yourdon. Thanks to all of you for making it possible for people to be greeted by a well informed steward at the summit! Also from the Lake Champlain Region is this great video taken at sunrise from Poke O Moonshine: <http://youtu.be/eV1IJyqWE0> . And don't forget that there is a work day coming up on Saturday, July 9th where volunteers are needed for trail work on the Ranger Trail. Plan to meet at the campground at 9. Call David Thomas-Train at 518-576-4592 or Tom Hayhurst at 518-562-9989 for details.

**Lyon Mountain:** One of the attendees at the ADK class for summer fire tower stewards was Chad who hopes to be greeting visitors at Lyon Mountain this summer.

**Rock Rift:** Ed Engleman will be taking the lead on this one. Congratulations on your retirement Ed and thanks so much for doing this!

**Sterling:** A new Park manager has been named. Wes Griffin is taking the lead on finishing up this project.

**Balsam Lake:** To reach the Balsam Lake Mountain fire tower from the top of the Millbrook Mountain Road, one follows an old town road through private property for approximately 2.25 miles. At that point, you pass a metal gate and begin the final .75 miles climb to the summit and its historic fire tower. You gain just about 500 feet in elevation over this section. Just beyond the aforementioned gate, you leave the private property behind and enter the Balsam Lake Mountain Wild Forest. That means the rules change. No motorized vehicles are allowed beyond this point. How to get a stack of nearly 40 freshly cut, green hemlock boards 8 feet in length, cut to 2x8 and 2x10 sizes to the summit? Dedicated volunteers!

The first weekend in May the lumber was picked up from Dry Brook Custom Sawmilling and Logging where owner/operator Jake Rosa (grandson of retired Forest Ranger Lester Rosa) had generously donated all of the lumber. My brother Lyle and my son Mike then carefully transported (took 3 trips) all of the lumber to the gate. Following that, 9 of Balsam Lake's volunteers started carrying the boards to the summit. As the day wore on, the pile at the gate slowly but surely was moved to the summit by the volunteers, some hikers who just happened to be visiting, and Forest Ranger Kenny Gierloff who came to lend a hand. Sunday morning Kenny was back for more as were a few die hard volunteers. By day's end, the majority of the lumber was stacked at the summit! In addition, other volunteers also stained the cabin and made other necessary repairs. Over the course of the summer the volunteers will be replacing and repairing all of the landing and step boards! Many, many thanks to all involved who made this gargantuan task seem small!



**Stillwater:** On June 5<sup>th</sup> my husband and I had the pleasure of finally getting to meet Jim Fox who has been heading up this project with great energy and enthusiasm. This was the last day of work and we met Jim and several key volunteers who have been central to the project from the beginning. We also met people like us, who were putting in their first day of work. Jim says, "It was our last work weekend ever, and for the first time since we started last September, we got rained out ... except you faithful volunteers came anyway because you must've known we didn't have a Plan B. Yes, there was quite a bit of rain, but that did nothing to dampen the work of those in attendance. They got the windows in, the map table in, painted the fencing, constructed the top step of the top stairway, repaired the railing, cleaned up the summit, and everything looks awesome!" Jim and his crew are to be commended for a fabulous and thoughtful job of restoring this beautiful fire tower! A Grand Opening ceremony is set for July 2<sup>nd</sup>. We'll have more about this on our facebook page. Here is a link to their web page: <http://www.friendsofstillwaterfiretower.com/pictures.html>

**Northeastern Conference:** Don't forget to make plans to attend our Northeastern Conference of the FFLA on September 17<sup>th</sup> & 18<sup>th</sup> in Keene, NY. You can find a google map with some possible suggestions for restaurants and lodging along with the fire house itself, the fire towers that can be visited, and area museums on the FFLA's home page: <http://www.firelookout.org/index.html>. You can also easily become a member or renew your membership on our website too!

\*\*I will be sending along a separate e-mail in the coming days with more details and registration forms for the conference!

You guys have a lot going on out there this summer and I may have overlooked something. If you have an update for a project you are involved with or need some help with a project, please don't hesitate to let me know.

Laurie Rankin  
Director NYS FFLA