

Forest Fire Lookout Association - New York Chapter - March 2017

The second half of February and the beginning of March have seen weather extremes with temperatures that range from nearly 70 degrees to several degrees below zero. The wind has been pretty sharp as well. And then there was Stella – not the name of a former NYS Observer, but rather the name of the blizzard that just occurred, dumping anywhere from 20 to 40 inches in many parts of the state. This is a good thing for fire prevention and we sincerely hope that it will all soak into the ground and make for a short spring fire season.

Retired Forest Ranger Paul Hartmann, Sr. recalls another such storm from 1966: “We worked with the local FD's delivering medications to the snowbound and transporting nurses and doctors back and forth to the hospitals. Big 4WD trucks were just coming into their own about that time, and because most rangers carried slipon water tanks, ours were all 3/4 or sometimes 1 Ton's. Every hour or two we needed to pull inside the fire station, raise the hood and clear all the snow that was funneled up around the motor, so it would continue to run smoothly.”

In Memoriam: It is with both sadness and fond memories that I report the passing of the oldest retired NYS Forest Ranger this past month. Lester A. Rosa, 98, of Dry Brook passed away peacefully on February 27th surrounded by all of his children. Lester was born on the family farm in Dry Brook on January 29th 1919 to Albert and Della Mae (Vermilyea) Rosa. He was one of 8 children. As a young man he worked for his Uncle "Bill Hen" (Henry) Rosa in his automotive shop and for the Town of Middletown Highway Department. In 1944 he was appointed a New York State Forest Ranger. He served in that capacity with distinction until he retired in 1974. The NYS Ranger Honor Guard were present for the services where an overwhelming number of people turned out to pay tribute to Lester.

Lester's area covered much of what my Dad could see from the Balsam Lake Mountain Fire Tower. Lester had a great sense of humor, deadpan facial expressions and one never knew if he was serious or not. On one occasion my Dad reported a smoke several miles distant. Lester went to the location and suppressed the fire. Then via radio (which meant all of NYS could hear) came the following message: “1-4 to Balsam Lake, over” loud and stern. My Dad answered with some trepidation based on the tone of Lester's voice. “Balsam Lake to 1-4, over” came his reply. To which Lester continued in his stern voice -“The next time you send me on a fire, you better be more accurate. You missed this one by 150 feet! 1-4 clear”. This was Lester's way of complimenting my Dad on his accurate location of the fire. Early June evenings would often find Lester and his sons, along with my Dad and brother, off trout fishing on a small stream. On fall weekends, he would be hunting with his kids. Lester loved the outdoors and it showed in all he did both personally and professionally. May you be busy retelling some of those adventures with friends. 1-4 Clear

Trivia Question from February: No responses were sent in regarding the question about the type of french pump that was supplied to forest rangers for testing or the year that it occurred. The year was 1923. The **French Vermorel spray pump** was a can shaped like knapsack which was carried on the back with a lever easily operated by one hand which enabled the operator to deliver a stream of water on the fire through a short length of hose held in the other hand. While it worked well when spraying in a vineyard, it lacked the water pressure necessary for wildland fire fighting. It was replaced after a few years with another more common item, the Indian Tank.

Trivia Question for March: I've still got some FFLA stickers, so let's try something a bit more straight forward for this month. What year did it become mandatory to fly the flag from the tower to signify that the Observer was on duty?

Announcements: Remember the Burn Ban went into effect on March 16th and will continue through May 14th. The details can be found here: <http://www.dec.ny.gov/press/109462.html>.

Gardening at the tower/cabin site: With less than a month to go before returning to their duties, Observers would have found themselves busy planning for the season ahead by mid March. One of the items they often planned for was a garden. At Woodhull, the first Observer, David Beedle who served from 1912 to 1926 carried soil up for a flower garden. When I first visited the site in July of 2015, I found the location of the cabin by the flowers that were still blooming at the site! Often the Observer supplemented his food with a vegetable garden as well. On Black Mountain Observer, Jim Cranker had both. At Rock Rift, the cabin no longer stands, but the daffodils that Observer Linda Trask planted will be poking up through the soil soon. In the photo is Observer Trask of Rock Rift, NYSDEC archives photo and spring 2016.



Friends of St. Regis: Congrats on making the front cover of the Adirondack Explorer's March/April 2017 issue and a great article inside too!

Tower Closures: Both Wakely Mountain and Sterling Forest Fire Towers are currently closed to the public. Wakely has been listed by the NYSDEC as “found to be structurally unsound and has been closed to the public until further notice.” Sterling Forest Fire Tower has also been closed. The FFLA is actively working on trying to reverse both of these closures. More on Sterling Forest under the Help Wanted section below. DEC has also issued the following regarding Mount Adams Fire Tower: “The top landing of the Mount Adams fire tower near Tahawus has been damaged by ice and wind. Users should avoid the tower until repairs are completed later this year.”

HELP WANTED

Friends of Bald Mountain: They write, “FoBM committee is very much in need of more volunteers to help us on our spring and fall workdays. Several of our original members are not able to work anymore due to health issues. You don't need to live here in Old Forge to volunteer. A simple form needs to be filled out and filed with the DEC office in Herkimer to be covered by workman's comp. Send us a note and we'll provide the form and details and notify you of scheduled workdays. If necessary, we'll find you accommodations with a committee person here in Town and reimburse you for your travel expenses. We would love to find a volunteer willing to put up and maintain a Facebook page for us to network and share stories with other hikers”.

Friends of Sterling Forest: The FFLA is working with the Friends of Sterling Forest, the Sterling Forest State Park, and Team Rubicon to restore and reopen the historic Sterling Forest Fire Tower. A work plan is ready and waiting for volunteers to help us out. We have made plans for work to occur on the weekend of May 13th and 14th. If we should have a real wash out weather wise, we would move our work to the weekend of June 17th and 18th. Thank you for considering! If you would be interested in helping out, please let me know.

Azure Mountain Friends: Azure Mountain has a long history of educational programming, beginning in 2003. They are looking for individuals to volunteer for the 2017 summer season. The Friends promise that no two days will be alike. For more information check out their website: <http://azuremountain.org/volunteer.htm>.

Pillsbury Mountain Fire Tower: We are trying to get some interest so that we can approach the NYSDEC and get work done at Pillsbury Mountain Fire Tower. We have someone who has stepped up to lead the project. Please let me know if you might be interested in helping. If we can get enough support, we can try to move this forward.

Mysteries: Several mystery photos have been offered for identification over on our Chapter's Facebook page. We gave an FFLA sticker to the 100th person to like the page this past month. Many thanks to all who are contributing to the page. It is making it an interactive place with lots of good information. Check it out <http://facebook.com/groups/FFLANYS>.

Membership: Ever wonder about fire towers and lightning events such as St. Elmo's fire or properly grounding a tower? Check out the resources on our FFLA web page. You will find this information and much more if you wander around a bit. <http://www.firelookout.org/resources.html>.

Celebration Plans at Poke O Moonshine: The weekend of July 28-30, 2017 will see the celebration of the Centennial (1917-2017) of the restored Poke-O-Moonshine fire tower and the 20th Anniversary (1997-2017) of The Friends of Poke-O-Moonshine, which has worked to restore the fire tower and trails on the mountain, and to educate the hiking public about the human and natural history of the mountain and the Adirondack region. Friday, July 28 at 5 PM the juried Poke-O-Moonshine Art Exhibit will open at 1719 Block Gallery, Keeseville. For details on submitting artwork, go to <http://www.1719blockgallery.com/artists/> A slide show, "Fire Tower History and Current Work at Poke-O-Moonshine" will be shown at Adirondack Architectural Heritage, www.aarch.org, 1745 Main Street in Keeseville. On Sunday, July 30th late morning, there will be a hike to Poke-O-Moonshine summit and fire tower. Meet at the summit at 1 PM to tour the tower, eat lunch, and enjoy singing by the Essex-based singers, The Wannabees. Between 3 and 4 PM, gather at the Campground at the base of Poke-O-Moonshine for cake and speeches by some who have been closely involved in the history and restoration of the fire tower at Poke-O and fire towers on other mountains. Cap off the events with a party at Ausable Brewing Company in Keeseville, <http://ausablebrewing.tumblr.com> from 4:30 to 7:30 PM. Food will be provided by Mace Chasm Farm <http://www.macechasmfarm.com>, music by local bands: Ploughman's Lunch, Speedy Arnold, and The Wannabees. Mark your calendars!

Book Section: Marty Podskoch has been a supporter of fire towers for years. He has written several books about fire towers. They include "Catskill Fire Towers Their History and Lore", "Adirondack Fire Towers Their History and Lore Northern District", and "Adirondack Fire Towers Their History and Lore Southern District" in addition to other titles. He is planning on having an updated version of the Southern District out this spring. Marty updated the Catskill book recently too. Both books are available at our on line FFLA store or at <http://www.adirondackstories.com/otherbooks.html>.

Centennial Celebrations: This month we are featuring Snowy Fire Tower.

There was a wooden tower on the summit, then in 1917 the first steel tower was placed on the summit. It was only 22 feet high and it was not long before the trees closed in the view. In 1933, the State added a 20 foot extension so that the Observer could once again have visibility from the tower cab. The tower was closed in 1971. Once abandoned, it quickly fell into a state of disrepair. A restoration effort in 2011, led by Forest Ranger Greg George, along with the assistance of numerous partners, allowed it to once again be a place where visitors could get the expansive views.



Postcard courtesy of M. Podskoch. Photo courtesy of Bob Eckler.

From “Marty Podskoch's Adirondack Fire Towers Their History and Lore The Southern Districts” regarding Snowy: “They strung a telephone line eleven and one half miles long and built a log cabin for the Observer along with the 1909 fifteen foot tall log tower. Total cost of the station \$989.02.” All of these efforts were to help cover a vast area that was burnt over in the fires of 1903 and 1908. Cabin postcard courtesy of Paul Hartmann, other photos unknown.



Wildfires are already active throughout the United States with numerous fires reported in Oklahoma, Kansas, Colorado, and Florida this past month. Let us hope our spring fire season in New York will be a quiet one. Let us also hope that the restoration and maintenance season ahead will find lots of folks turning out to volunteer to help out. One extra person with a paint brush, to carry a piece of lumber or a tool or to provide refreshments can make all the difference.

Laurie Rankin, Director
New York State Chapter
Forest Fire Lookout Association
845-926-2182
lauriejrankin@gmail.com / www.ffla.org