

Forest Fire Lookout Association New York State Chapter December 2017 Newsletter

As we move to the completion of 2017, the beginning of winter and the busyness of what is for many a holiday season filled with shopping, great food, family and friends, let's take a moment to celebrate! Put another log on the fire, grab your favorite beverage, perhaps a gingerbread cookie or two, put your feet up and take in this newsletter. It begins with a celebration as we have added another fire tower to New York State! Yes, that fire tower photo you see below is the latest fire tower to stand on NYS soil. Erected on December 1, 2017 by Davana LLC at the Grafton Lakes State Park's new Welcome Center. Liz Wagner, the Environmental Educator at the Park told me a bit more about it. *“Grafton Lakes State Park's Dickinson Hill Fire Tower has inspired many hikers to journey to the top, and we want to make that connection for the next generation of outdoor explorers. As we developed a plan for our new natural playspace, we knew a model fire tower of some kind would be a draw for families and might encourage them to take the hike to the actual tower for a family adventure. The new playground will open in the Spring and will also include a giant bird nest, interpretative panels on local wildlife, and simple nature-based play items like a log balance beam and rock spiral for hopping along. We hope Fire Tower enthusiasts will come to the park to take the journey to the tower, and now you can bring your littlest adventurers to the Nature Explorer's Lookout by our new Welcome Center too!”*



Photographs are courtesy of Dave Vana.

While fire towers are rich with history and we want to be certain to save that history and pass it along to others (Dave Vana tells me the fire tower was originally located in the Florida panhandle at West Bay), it is just as imperative that we get the next generation involved with fire towers. We are very thankful to the Grafton Lakes State Park and the opportunity this fire tower will provide to encourage the next generation and their parents to learn about fire towers and their role.



Follow Up: Along the lines of getting our rich history correct, I was honored to be able to spend a couple of hours with Retired NYS Forest Ranger, Greg George after last month's newsletter was sent out. In that newsletter Blue Mountain was featured as our final centennial tower of 2017. Greg in his role as the Forest Ranger that covered Blue Mountain at the time was instrumental in restoring that fire tower. He shared with me the early efforts, the support of the DEC, including the administration and the guys in the shop as well as the community to save the tower. Greg had a number of photographs as well as some newspaper articles and his recollections of those efforts. Fixing up unique old structures at the top of a mountain came with a number of challenges. The guys in the shop had to fabricate new windows, the tower needed to be scraped and painted, all new wood had to be put on, etc. Getting materials to the top seems easy today with a helicopter. That was not done at the time. Instead the road was utilized but still presented its challenges. And is any repair job ever quite complete? In this case, shortly after the work was done, the roof blew off! But Greg and his team prevailed and it was quickly replaced. The Friends of Blue Mountain group supported this effort by fund raising so that a steward could be placed at the tower on the weekends to greet visitors. Current NYS Forest Ranger, Jason Scott joined Greg and I and told of the continuing success of that program. NYSDEC still offers their support for the vital educational component of a steward presence at the summit. Greg had so much fun with the project at Blue, that he went on to work on Snowy and other towers. More on those stories in a future issue. Thank you Greg for all of your work and support of fire towers!

Last minute holiday shopping to do? Consider purchasing a patch or t-shirt to support your favorite fire tower. You may also consider a donation to your favorite fire tower group on behalf of the gift recipient.



My question about hunting season garnered an interesting response from Bill Tindall whose father, George was the Observer at Kempshall. Bill said the tower was almost always closed by the time hunting season arrived simply due to weather, with snow often blanketing the nearby terrain in September. He did also mention his dad took a state record bobcat and shared the photo with me. Thanks very much for sending that feedback Bill.

Steve Canfield, Former Observer at Graham Fire Tower shared an interesting recollection about hunting as well. In his case, it was for rabbits and with assistance from his beagle, Jingles. Following proper protocol, Steve would have to sign out of service to retrieve his rabbit. Nearby Observers would often radio back to see if he had successfully retrieved the rabbit when he returned to service. Steve said hasenpfeffer was a staple of tower food. Thanks for that recollection Steve.

Speaking of eating, Paul Hartmann transcribed Observer William Sanderson's diary from West Mt 1909. William mentions what he eats nearly every day in his diary. He mentions rain nearly as often. Thank you for this lovely look back in time Paul.

<http://www.nysforestrangers.com/rangers-sanderson.htm>

Two books of the month. 'Relentless Pursuit Inside the Escape from Dannemora: New York State's Largest Manhunt' by Incident Commander, Major Charles E. Guess NYS Police (Ret.) was reviewed by Retired Forest Ranger, Paul Hartmann. Paul says "Every one of you who takes the time and effort to read this, will share my admiration and respect for the new Ranger Force, now on the job." At last the second edition of 'Views From On High' by Jack Freeman and Jim Schneider has been released. This long awaited second edition has all of the descriptions necessary if you are planning on visiting a fire tower inside the Catskill and Adirondack park as well as a few others too.

Updates

St. Regis: Nancy LaBombard has generously volunteered to work on Centennial Celebration plans for the group. If you would like to lend a hand or have some ideas, please let the group or myself know.

Azure Mt: Centennial Patches are now available, see all of their plans: <http://azuremountain.org/>

Stillwater Fire Tower: The tower will reopen on the winter solstice. Looking ahead, you may also wish to partake in a first day hike planned there. Meet at 10 am at the trailhead. <https://www.friendsofstillwaterfiretower.com/>

Winter Parking: If you plan to visit a fire tower this winter, be aware that not all trailheads are plowed out. Please follow all posted parking restrictions, such as no parking in the snowplow turn around.

ADK High Peaks Foundation Grant: They write "As a direct result of donations made on Giving Tuesday November 28th in support of Neil Luckhurst' upcoming Project 100 Fundraising Epic we are proud to announce that our first Grant for 2018 for \$1,000 will go to "Sum(m)it Up For Poke-O": Poke-O-Moonshine's Ranger Trail Rehab Project." From the Grant Application "In 2011, the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) announced that because of severe erosion, it would consider closing the historic Ranger Trail on Poke-O-Moonshine Mountain. This hiking route has documented use from the 1850s, the summit fire tower was constructed in 1917, and the Friends of Poke-O-Moonshine have been land stewards and educators on the mountain since 1997. The Friends worked with DEC to restore the fire tower as an educational and historic site in 2005, and to re-purpose the Ranger Trail as an interpretive trail in the same year. This team has hired and supervised Environmental Studies college students as Fire Tower Stewards to engage and educate Poke-O's hiking public every summer during this period. Approximately 20,000 hikers climb the mountain annually, from as far as Japan and as close as nearby Keeseville. Adirondack Mountain Club (ADK) chapters, school classes, sports teams, and summer camps hike Poke-O-Moonshine. The mountain has a huge following. Because New York State had no funds to rehabilitate the Ranger Trail, the Friends of "Poke-O" in 2013 undertook a five-year campaign to keep this educational trail open to the hiking public." To learn more about Neil Luckhurst's 'Project - 100', his upcoming major fundraiser to climb the 100 highest Adirondack Mountains in a single winter, to benefit the ADKHighpeaks Foundation, please visit his blog <https://project100singlewinter.wordpress.com/> and be inspired! A big thank you from the FFLA for supporting fire towers!

I would be remiss if I did not mention the ongoing situation in the State of California. Dry conditions, terrain, and the Santa Ana winds have wreaked havoc there in the past week. Thoughts and prayers to all who are working those fires, and the residents there to stay safe. <http://www.ksby.com/story/37045718/fire-efforts-improve-as-thomas-fire-burns-231700-acres>

In 2018 the FFLA will once again be offering restoration grants. Other grants that may be available to your group may be through Adventure NY, Smart Growth Grants, Watershed Grants, ADKHP Grants, Parks and Trail Partners Grants and others. Check in your local area too.

This newsletter will see a few changes as we move forward in 2018. The trivia question will be replaced by a lost lookouts section some months and some months we will have a puzzle instead. I also hope to add a calendar section where we can include upcoming events as well as routine items to remember, such as “now is the time to sign up for a National Trails Day event”. This is your newsletter and if you have suggestions and/or contributions, please let me know. I would be happy to include them.

Still have your feet up next to that roaring fire? I hope so. I hope this newsletter brings you warm memories and inspires you to plan ahead for 2018. I hope those plans will include the FFLA NYS Chapter in some way. Perhaps your talent lies in sharing your memories, or the old photos you have. Perhaps you are a graphic artist who can help a group design a new patch. Perhaps your talent lies in being a great organizer, a party planner, grant writer, or a generous contributor in other ways. Whatever you can give, we will greatly appreciate it.

While your feet are up by that roaring fire perhaps you think you have little to share. Perhaps reading my favorite Christmas Story ever will explain to you that we all have something to give. Not only that, but what we give will be passed along to the “leettle ones”. Christmas in the Adirondacks by William H Murray and read by John McDonough helps explain it all. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kt7us84Se0I>

The Happiest of Holidays to all of you and your families.



Laurie Rankin, Director NYS Chapter FFLA

Photo courtesy of Warren Johnsen