



**Forest Fire Lookout Association
New York State Chapter
February 2018**

Communications: One of the most important facets of fire towers was and still is their role in communications. Our communications systems have changed markedly since the early 1900's when fire towers were first being erected as part of a state wide fire prevention system. Phone lines and phones were often installed before towers. Some of the phones were placed on trees. Daily maintenance of the phone lines was a big part of the Observers duties. So too was phone etiquette. From the document Fire Observation Stations, believed to be dated August 1965 proper phone protocol is listed as follows: *“If it is a toll call, the Observer should inform the operator that he wants to report a fire and ask her in a courteous manner to rush the call. If the observation station is on a party line and the Observer finds the line in use, he should, in a courteous manner, interrupt the people talking to tell them that he has to report a fire and ask them if they will yield the use of the line to him while he makes his report. The exercise of courtesy on the part of the Observer in using the telephone line will do much to speed up the service and maintain good will.... Report of telephone calls – The Observer is required to keep a record of all telephone calls put out from his station for which a toll charge will be made against the station. He should list each call under the proper date, giving place called, and whether it was person-to-person, or station call. At the end of each month, he should transmit this report to his District Ranger. The purpose of this report is to provide the District office with a check against any errors which might occur in the telephone company bill received by the District Office.”* Thank you Dick Veloshen for sharing.

Many telephone poles still stand along the hiking trails to the fire towers. Owl's Head is one such example. I asked Jim Cronn of the Friends of Owl's Head about the stamps on the poles and he offered the following. *“The original lines were non insulated galvanized wire so something as minor as a small branch touching the wire would render the line unusable. The observer would attempt to 'call in' to the ranger at a preassigned time every day. If the call was unsuccessful the observer would start at the tower and the ranger would start at the road and they would inspect the line until the problem was located. They carried portable phones they could clip onto the line to test it. The numbers and or letters on the pole enabled them to pinpoint the exact location of any point on the line as pole locations were maintained in a database according to the designations on the pole.”*



Several of our NYS fire towers were re-purposed to hold communications equipment, thus saving them from being removed. Over time our technology has changed and in some cases we have been able to remove the communications equipment from the fire towers to other locations or to downsize the equipment. Blue Mt. fire tower in last month's newsletter was a great example of this. In some areas with poor coverage, equipment will be added, such as occurred with Stillwater Fire Tower last fall. Expect to see more of these types of changes in 2018 across NYS as fire towers and communication continue their relationship.

In several meetings around the state this past month several projects were discussed. In many cases, we could use help from FFLA volunteers as we work together with the NYSDEC, local groups and municipalities. There are numerous ways in which we can assist from painting, to providing a cold beverage or sandwich, carpentry skills, web site design, recruitment, haulers, trail workers, fund raisers and historians. If you would like to lend a hand, please let me know.

RIDGES

Fire on the Ridge Fire broke out the afternoon of Saturday, April 24 2016 near Sam's Point on the Shawangunk Ridge. There were numerous visitors in the park on this warm spring day. Evacuation of visitors went well. The fire was fed by the warm temperatures, low humidity, and winds. Volatile materials such as pitch pine and mountain laurel and a heavy fuel load on the ground as the area had not burned in several years all contributed to the fire. Fortunately, there were service roads to help access the area and Lake Maratanza was available for water drops with Bambi buckets. And finally, the weather cooperated. Over 2000 acres burned. The trails were closed for over a year. It was very interesting to have the opportunity to walk through the burn area last fall. It was clear to see where fire lines held and where fire lines were jumped. And all would have been well within the view of the High Point Fire Tower if it had still been standing today. A great video of the fire is here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QocMeAcGG0c>. This video is a great view of the aftermath of the fire area: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WhMW4eLIub0>. Some follow up photos show where fire lines held and where fire jumped the lines. They also show where regrowth is happening.



Ward Pound Ridge Reservation was the site of the Cross River Fire Tower. In our next lost lookout segment in March we will be featuring that fire tower. The folks at Raven's Rock Run will be holding a 10K race on November 11th to support the effort to return the fire tower to its original location. Check out this link for more information and to see how you can support their efforts. <http://ravenrocksrn.org>

We have a winner! That's right, a Jeopardy winner! Rachel Lindgren, a Fire Lookout from Bend Oregon, was a 5 time Jeopardy champ last month! If you missed the games, you can do some google searches. A video clip is here: <https://ficklefame.com/final-jeopardy-week-of-1-22-18/> Well done Rachel. We hope to see you in the Tournament of Champions.

Trivia: – Back in October, no one answered the question about how many towers had the USFS Fire Danger station. It is believed that there was one in each district, though that one was not necessarily on a fire tower. That brings us to a new trivia question for February. How many fire districts were there in NYS in 1967? Don't forget, an FFLA sticker is sent to the winner!

Puzzle solution from November: Observatory, Fire Tower, Signal, Axe, Fuel, and Telephone were all hidden in the puzzle.

Book of the month: *Another Day, Another Dollar The Civilian Conservation Corps in the Catskills*, by Diane Galusha, and *Adirondack Civilian Conservation Corps Camps: History, Memories and Legacy of the CCC*, by Marty Podskoch, are our books for February. Both of these books focus on the CCC, which played an integral role in the state's fire prevention system. In next month's newsletter, we will explore the partnerships that included the building of fire towers, fire roads, fire ponds, reforestation, and more.

Around the State news and announcements

Mt Arab: The Friends of Mount Arab group did a great upgrade on their website – check it out here: <http://friendsofmountarab.org/index.html>

Mt Adams and Poke O Moonshine: Both of these fire towers benefited from a grant award from the Adirondacks High Peaks Foundation. <http://www.adkhighpeaksfoundation.org/adkhp/> I have been honored to participate in their annual winter gathering fund raiser for a number of years. During this event, hikers summit each of the 46 high peaks. Upping the game this year, one of the founders, Neil Luckhurst, is climbing the 100 highest peaks in the Adirondacks. To follow his journey and to get information about the fund raiser, check out the web page: <https://project100singlewinter.wordpress.com/>

Hunter Mountain Fire Tower Cabin: Open the weekend of Feb 24th and 25th. Tower will be closed.

Stillwater: The First Day hike at Stillwater was rescheduled to January 15th due to dangerously cold temperatures. It was a tad bit warmer, but not much. Negative ten to be precise. Friends of Stillwater were not deterred and set up a great first day hike under



blue skies. Many visitors came to enjoy a cup of hot cocoa courtesy of Stewart's Shop and the Friends group, donned their snow shoes and hiked to the summit. Photos Courtesy Friends of Stillwater.

Facebook Changes: Did you know we have a Facebook page – FFLA New York State Chapter? The National group does as well as and several other individual groups. The National group gave us a heads up on what to do with the latest Facebook changes and may be worth letting people know about here: *“There are also those of you that choose to follow our page for a reason - whether its historical pictures on [#tbt](#), rental information, job postings, fire season impacts to lookouts, or just lookout news in general- we're so glad you're here and we'd like you to stay around. Here are a few quick steps that you can take to ensure that we stay connected and that you see all of our posts. First, please visit our page and click on the down arrow beside the 'Following' tab. Secondly, select 'see first' from the drop down menu.”* If you participate in social media, we encourage you to join the page. Recently we had a person join our group whose grandfather was associated with Prospect Mt Fire Tower and he has given us a great look through photos and text at what life was like there. Thank you Jim N. Also, Bill H posted a mystery photo of an old tool and as it turns out it was used to dig holes for telephone poles!

Anyone out there have old copies of the *Conservationist Magazine*? I have a few around and find them very interesting to read. I am particularly interested in the April/May 1973 issue. If anyone has a copy, I would appreciate it if you would let me know. Thanks so much!

Calendar Notes

Saturday, September 1st from 9-9:30 pm will be the Annual Lighting of the Fire Towers. Can your group participate? Rain date will be Sunday the 2nd.

Saturday, June 2nd is National Trails Day. Decide within your group or by working with the DEC or your municipality if you would like to participate. It is a great way to showcase your fire tower and to get some assistance in sprucing up or repairing the trail to your tower.

Sunday, April 22nd is Earth Day – Do you have any events planned?

Saturday, April 21st and Sunday, April 22nd, the Cornell Hill fire tower will be open to the public. It is the Town of Wilton Bicentennial celebration. <http://www.wiltonbicentennial.com/events/bicentennial-historic-celebration-weekend/>

Sunday, July 29, 2018 will be the Azure Mt Anniversary Celebration.

Tuesday, August 7, 2018 Marty Podskoch and myself will be presenting a program on Swede Mt Fire Tower. Stay tuned!

Hudson Valley River Ramble – registration is not open yet, but start thinking about this one. Check the website for information.

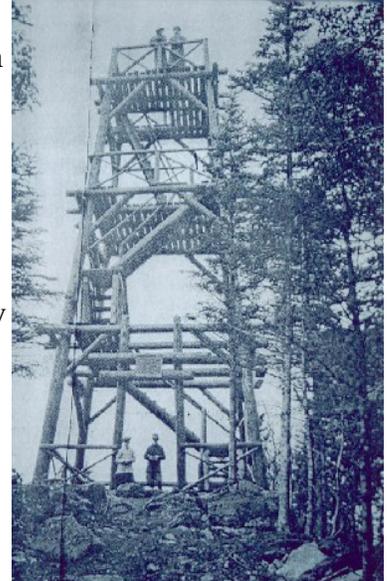
Centennial Towers in 2018

From the Conservation Commission report of 1918: 14 towers were purchased. Bald, Crane, Kempshall, Mt. Morris, and Stillwater were not put up. Of the remaining towers, DeBar and Pharaoh no longer stand. Gore and Black are encumbered by communications equipment and agreements. That leaves Arab, Azure, St. Regis, Swede and VanDerWhacker to celebrate centennials this year! 352 fires reported by observation stations and 398 fires were extinguished.

Let's talk about Gore and Black since we focused on communications this month. Happy Birthday to both towers, still standing tall under the burden of so much.



Black Mountain (so named for a forest fire that blackened the mountain) began service in 1911 with a wooden tower. That was replaced with the current 35 foot steel tower in 1918. The views of the Lake George region were exceptional from this location. So too were several of the Observers that served on this tower according to Marty Podskoch's book *Adirondack Fire Towers: The Southern District*. One such story relates the use of the tower by Eric Huntington, Observer there in 1977. Eric relates how *"one rainy day someone was lost and I had to stay on the tower to help with communications*



with the search party. When the lightning began, I knew I should get off, but I also knew that I was needed on the radio. I remembered an old timer telling me that during a storm you'd be safe if you stood on wood. So I tried it. Then the lightning struck the tower." It was closed in 1988 and a 39 foot antenna was installed above the cab to help State Police communications. The tower remains closed to the public but many hikers still visit the site.



Gore also sported a wooden tower prior to the current 60 foot steel tower that was erected in 1918. A 1919 hurricane blew this tower down and it was reconstructed in 1920. The State Police added radio repeaters in the 70's and then large microwave antennas in the 80's. It is said that the tower legs had to be reinforced to hold the weight of all this equipment. Closed in 1988 but many hikers continue to visit the site and enjoy the view from the top of a nearby ski run. Note in winter this is not an option.

Are you an FFLA member? Do you need to renew your membership? If so, it can be done very easily on our web page. Visit www.ffla.org for options. In addition to this newsletter you will receive the full color Lookout Network national magazine. For those of you who chair a group, expect to see a letter from me soon about becoming an FFLA affiliate in the near future, another way in which we hope to serve your group.

Remember our statewide burn ban will go into affect on March 16th and continue through May 14th.

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