



**Forest Fire Lookout Association
New York State Chapter
January 2019**

Fire Towers are rich with history, well connected to local communities, and continue to be visited by thousands of hikers. Part of our mission is to assist with all three through educational efforts. Today, many local groups provide either a paid or volunteer steward at the fire tower on busy weekends to greet hikers. The information they share is invaluable. Historically, this was also the case. The Fire Tower Observer who staffed a tower for the Conservation Commission was to watch for smoke, but while doing so they provided a great deal of public relations on behalf of the Commission. This article recently appeared in the Adirondack Almanack and while focused on the High Peaks of the Adirondacks, it applies to fire towers across NYS where you have a presence. Education is key. *“The Wilderness is healthier. All the credit goes to the people working hard to protect it. That starts with volunteers, trail associations, clubs and environmental groups, right through to forest rangers. These people do the dirty work to keep the interior protected and beautiful. But there is a common thread that I think is the key: hiker enlightenment. True, increased use has supplied a whole new crop of unprepared hikers, but overall the level of awareness concerning everything from bear canisters to alpine vegetation is different than in the past. Education is working.”*



<https://www.adirondackalmanack.com/2019/01/viewpoint-dont-overreact-to-crowds.html>

News from around the State

First Day Hikes: As often occurs in our large state, the weather looked quite lovely for the first day hike to Poke O Moonshine. I saw some nice photos from that trip. On the other hand, at Balsam Lake Mountain our hike was lightly attended. We had high winds, cold temps, an icy trail and snow squalls. Unfortunately, a lot of the people who expressed interest in the hike were not prepared for those conditions and we discouraged them from coming.

Hurricane: The Friends of Hurricane Mountain are always busy. The new roof is all made and now awaits a flight to be scheduled in the spring to get it to the tower. Their centennial plans are well underway. See below for more.

Jackie Jones: I reached out to the NYNJTC who had some funding to provide stewards in 2018 at the fire tower following our restoration work. Here was their take on how things went - “The Fire Tower Stewards program in Harriman went wonderfully last year! We had a couple of volunteers and a paid steward, one of the volunteers is a retired and knowledgeable park ranger who was fabulous on site and loved it. We also interfaced with the nearest public campground, Beaver Pond, who were delighted to send their people to the tower as a part day excursion.” At this time, there are no plans in place to continue this program for 2019.

Sterling Forest: Sterling Forest could still use some volunteers for their expanding program. They plan to be open on Saturdays and Sundays from Memorial Day through Columbus Day, 10 AM-3 PM. Please consider contacting Susan and signing up for a day or two at this great tower. For anyone who is interested in volunteering, or anyone who just wants more information about when they are open, how to get there, etc., contact her at sterlingfiretower01@gmail.com. The Visitor Center has a good supply of both Sterling Fire Tower patches and lapel pins to support the work there too.

Rescue on Bald Mountain: From Ranger Report 1-8-19: “Town of Webb Herkimer County Wilderness Rescue: On Jan. 4 at 2:08 p.m., a caller contacted Herkimer County 911 requesting help on the summit of Bald Mountain in the Ferris Lake Wild Forest. A Pittsford man was hiking with his wife when he slipped and fell on the icy summit and rammed into his 57-year-old wife. The woman sustained a left elbow dislocation injury. Herkimer County 911 dispatched Old Forge Fire/Rescue, a town of Webb Police Officer, and called DEC Ray Brook Dispatch to request Forest Ranger assistance. Five Forest Rangers and an Environmental Conservation Police Officer (ECO) were dispatched to help rescue the subject. Additionally, two Old Forge Rescue EMTs responded directly to the mountain and headed in to begin patient care. At approximately 4:28 p.m., rescuers using rope lowering techniques began patient extraction. Due to extreme treacherous icy conditions under the snow, rescue efforts were slowed. At 6:07 p.m., the patient was at the trailhead and transferred to Old Forge Rescue ambulance for transport to Utica hospital. All units were clear at 6:30 p.m.”

Centennial Towers

From the Annual Conservation Report of 1919: Eleven new towers were purchased. They were Boreas, Moose River, West, Tooley Pond, Beaver Lake, Hurricane, Owls Head, Whiteface in the Adirondacks and High Point, Balsam Lake and Twaddell Point in the Catskills. Some of these towers are gone, some have been relocated, (or at least part of them have), some remain in private hands and some remain open to the visiting public. We will feature these towers throughout 2019 in our newsletter. If you have information to share about any of them, please let me know. We would love your input!

Centennial Celebration Plans

Hurricane: There is a firm date for their centennial celebration, the evening of August 8th when there will be a reception and talk/program at the Elizabethtown Adirondack History Museum. That event will also mark the opening of a small exhibit at the museum on the Fire Tower. They plan to sponsor hikes on the 10th or 11th up to the tower for those able and to the site of the observer cabin for others.

Stillwater: Saturday, August 24th plans are underway – stay tuned!

Balsam Lake: Centennial event planning is underway for the weekend of August 2-4. Events will take place on both sides of the mountain and at the summit over the course of the three days.

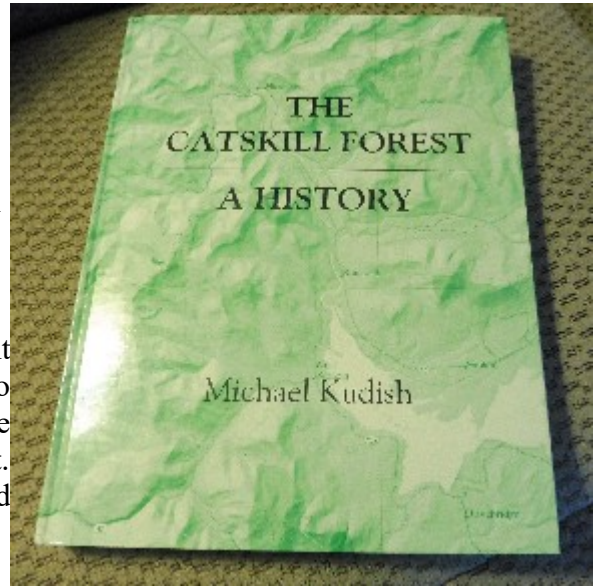
Let's talk a bit about our state's fire tower history. It is commonly thought that the first fire tower in NYS was on Balsam Lake Mountain. Some recently uncovered documents describe this in detail. They were provided by Sherry Shaver Bellows, from the writings of Lena Tiffany, local author. "The first log observatory was built on the 3720 foot high Balsam Mountain top in 1887 by the Balsam Lake Club under the supervision of their Club Warden, Sturgis Buckley with the assistance of these neighbors: William (Bill) Haynes, Joseph Reels, Daniel Hyzer, Jacob Samuels, Anthony (Tony) Becker, Aaron Ward, Norwood Samuels, Samuel Banks, and Phil Ives, and their teams of oxen and horses. The logs were drawn to the highest point of the mountain and the tower was constructed. Mr. Cornelius VanBrunt, first president of the club took a picture of the workmen. Mr. Frank Mead of Arena drew the plans for the Observatory. Many of the 22 club members enjoyed the trip up to the observatory. The elevation is 2600 feet at the Clubhouse and the 1720 foot rise in elevation as well as the distance by road and path was too tiring for some of the older members to visit the mountaintop. Entries in the club register for 1901: August 11 a party of 6 went up Balsam Lake Mountain to the Observatory which they found in ruins. It is believed that lightning had struck and burned the first Observatory. During the summer of 1905 my father, George H Owen, Warden at the Balsam Lake Clubhouse, stream wardens and neighbors built the second log Observatory on Balsam Mountain. On December 24 that year, President of the Club Mr. Sidney Smith visited the new Observatory and wrote in the club's register 'The Observatory affords a glorious view in all directions and it is very strongly built.' The New York State Conservation department decided to place a steel tower on the mountain in 1919 and hire a man to watch for fires. My brother was employed by the state to help with building the fire tower and to build a small cabin and act as the fire Observer and warden. The telephone, maps, field glasses, etc were kept in the cabin."

If you go the NYSDEC website and read more about Balsam Lake Fire Tower you will find the following information that mostly agrees with Mrs. Tiffany's documentation. "The first forest fire tower in New York State was erected on Balsam Lake Mountain (elevation 3,723 ft.) in 1887. Built of wood by the Balsam Lake Club, it survived until 1901 and was replaced with another wooden tower in 1905. Telephone lines, a small observer's cabin and a road to the summit were added in 1909 when the state took it over. The first steel tower was erected in 1919, and the present steel tower (47 feet tall) was built in 1930." However, no documentation can be found that tells of a second steel tower being built in 1930 just 11 years after the first steel tower. Nor is there any documentation that discusses the catastrophic events that would have led to the 1919 towers demise. Sometimes it is difficult to determine exact events in history. We are fortunate to have some first hand documentation about how the steel got to the Balsam Lake Mountain summit in 1919. We will share that in our February newsletter.



Balsam Mt. Tower
Sturgis Buckley 1898

Book of the Month: The Catskill Forest: A History by Michael Kudish is my bible of the Catskills. An extremely well researched volume that includes the history of forest fires in the area, complete with a map. Mike describes the natural forest and the integral part man (both Native American and European) has played in the forest. I often find myself reaching for this book before and after every hike and you will too!



Follow Up from December: Two additional grant options were brought to my attention. You would have to carefully consider how your program would fit the criteria, but it may be well worth it. <http://www.cloudsplitter.org> and <https://www.adirondackfoundation.org/online-grants-manager>



Trivia Question from December: Who was this dapper fellow? What tower was he associated with? Is it still standing? Why did he carry a clock?

Randy Kneer sent in the correct answer and the historical background that goes with it. “The fellow holding the Skiller clock is Noah LaCasse. The Clock was given to him by President Theodore Roosevelt and the pack basket was given by him too. Noah was Theodore Roosevelt's Guide on Mt. Marcy at the time when Roosevelt had to take leave because he got a telegram President McKinley was in bad shape. At the time Roosevelt was vice president of the United States. It was the famous midnight ride to North Creek railroad station to receive the telegram. Roosevelt became president of the United States when President McKinley passed away. Noah was a fire observer on the Cornell Hill Fire tower. The Fire tower was taken down and re-erected and restored at Camp Saratoga. Cornell Hill Fire tower was one of main contacts from the Dickinson Hill Fire tower.” Thanks for sending in the info Randy! Rick Miller soon followed with the correct answer as well.

Both gentlemen got an FFLA sticker for their correct answers!

A bit more history on the events that occurred. “Ever the restless adventurer and perhaps as a way to relieve anxiety, Roosevelt rallied his family to climb Mt. Marcy with the assistance of his trusted guide Noah LaCasse on September 12. When the weather began to deteriorate the next day, Roosevelt’s wife Edith and the children returned to the Tahawus Club, while the Vice President and a small group led by LaCasse pressed onward and upwards to the summit of Mt. Marcy, increasingly engulfed by ominous rain clouds.” <https://thehistorybandits.com/2015/11/22/the-midnight-rough-rider-theodore-roosevelts-ascendance-down-mount-marcy/>

Trivia Question for January: Only two individuals in the US have their own zip codes. One receives up to 13,000 letters a week. Who are these individuals? An FFLA sticker to the winner!

Calendar

Saturday, January 26, 2019, The Friends of Grafton Lakes State Park are holding their 34th annual Winterfest Celebration. Take part in activities and visit two fire towers while you are there; Dickinson Hill and the Visitor Center Playground Fire Tower. <https://www.albany.com/event/grafton-lakes-winter-fest-139307/>

Saturday, January 26, 2019, The Friends of Poke O Moonshine will be hosting Mammal Tracking with Elizabeth Lee. Meet at 9:30 at the Observer's trailhead. Held in cooperation with CATS (Champlain Area Trails).

Saturday, February 2, 2019, Friends of Poke O Moonshine will be hosting a back country ski trip. Meet at the Observer's trailhead at 9:30 to explore.

Friday, August 2 – Sunday, August 4, 2019 will be the Centennial Celebration for Balsam Lake Mountain.

Thursday, August 8, 2019 will be a reception and program to celebrate Hurricane Fire tower's centennial at the Elizabethtown museum.

Saturday and Sunday, August 10th and 11th, 2019 Friends of Hurricane Mountain will host hikes to the fire tower and Observers cabin as part of their celebration.

Saturday, August 24, 2019, The Friends of Stillwater Fire Tower will be holding their centennial celebration.

Northeastern Conference of the FFLA

Friday, June 7 through Sunday, June 9 will be the Northeastern Conference of the FFLA. Our location is now set, the Mount Tremper Fire House in Mount Tremper. Numerous lodging options are available in the area from camping to resorts and everything in between, so plan on coming and staying for a few days! Another large event will be in the area, Taste of Country at Hunter Mountain so we suggest you make reservations early. Our line up of speakers is progressing well, will cover a wide variety of topics, and be very interesting. We should have the speakers all confirmed by next month. We will also visit several fire towers in the area. What a great chance to hang out with fellow fire tower enthusiasts!

Brrrr – winter's chill is setting in this week with sub-zero temperatures at many of our fire towers. The steel is cold, the ice load is building, the trees are snapping in the slight breeze, and snow is in the forecast. I think I will plan a walk in the winter woods to a fire tower soon. First, I will throw another log on the fire. Stay warm!

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