



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

What did a Fire Tower Observer do in the depths of a snowy, cold February? Well first and foremost, he or she likely had to earn a living. Observer pay was not so great that they could work from April to November and have enough left to hold them over the winter, particularly if he or she had a family to feed. Pay in the early 1900's was about \$50.00 per month. By 1919 it was up to \$82.00 per month, and at the time that towers began to be decommissioned in the 70's, it was a whopping \$228.00, but again only for those months you worked. Some Observers took to the winter woods logging, some worked clearing roads, cutting ice, guiding and trapping. And they hoped to be rehired come spring.

In 2019 it is not about being rehired in spring, but rather possible changes to the agreement that many friends groups have with the NYSDEC, commonly referred to as the VSA or Voluntary Service Agreement. These agreements are between the owner of many towers, the NYSDEC and individual groups that have adopted fire towers; such as the Friends of Hurricane Mountain, Friends of Mount Arab, the FFLA and many others. A memo from the DEC dated the end of December has been sent to these groups in the last weeks by individual DEC Regions regarding clarification of liability coverage for volunteers through these VSA's. In that memo, NYS was reminding VSA holders of the coverage that they had through this agreement. According to the DEC's own VSA Procedures, VSA Procedure covers BOTH Workers Compensation and Liability. <https://www.dec.ny.gov/regulations/90822.html> See V.B.6: "As volunteers in this Program, participants are provided with the same liability and workers compensation protection as salaried state employees, as long as they are acting within the scope and terms of the Agreement and comply with the Department's guidelines for use of volunteers." Does it seem like I am speaking another language? It sure does. Until the DEC sends us a new policy and updated VSA, we can only speculate. Each Friends' group and VSA is a bit different and it is difficult for us to offer assistance other than to suggest that you contact your insurance provider to discuss your particular, unique situation. We trust the DEC will clarify this ASAP so that all volunteers can continue their important role in the preservation and continued maintenance of NYSDEC fire towers.

National FFLA: Would you like to get more involved in the FFLA? Our current webmaster, Bill Cobb has done an outstanding job with our web page. In addition to his time working on the web page, Bill has also generously donated the cost of the page. Now Bill needs some help to keep up with the web page updates and postings. Could you lend a hand? Do you know someone who has the skills and would be willing to help out? If so, please let me know.

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The SUMMER 2018 edition of Lookout Network is released!

Winter Board Meeting 2019

Join FFLA (NY) TNF

Would you like to get more involved with the FFLA? We have a great opportunity to be the FFLA Webmaster. Contact our current webmaster or FFLA Chairman for more information!

News from around the State

Mount Arab: I received the Friends of Mt Arab newsletter this month. I love the photos of the new Observer's cabin floor! It must have been quite a task to carry all that material up there! www.friendsofmontarab.org. They also have a trail maintenance date scheduled. See the calendar below for more details.

Poke O Moonshine: Help Wanted. Fire Tower Steward Opening For Summer 2019. The work week is 40 hours, Thursday–Monday, mid-June – late August. Pay for 2019 is approximately \$14/hour. Detailed Job Description sent to serious interested candidates. Qualifications: Upper-division college undergraduates or graduates with appropriate field(s) of study, and strong interpersonal and public speaking skills. Candidates must be physically fit and able to work alone in a remote location under adverse weather conditions, and have the willingness and experience to interrelate with people of all ages and backgrounds. Basic Red Cross 1st Aid/CPR and Leave No Trace certifications preferred. Candidates must provide their own transportation. Candidates should be familiar with The Friends of Poke-O-Moonshine and its work via pokeomoonshine.org. The application contact is the Friends' Coordinator, David Thomas-Train at friendsofpoko@gmail.com by February 15. Serious applications only. **Note the deadline is today!**

Goodsell Museum: Our friends at the Goodsell Museum over in Old Forge where you should be sure to visit the As Far As the Eye Can See fire tower exhibit have a new scanner. It will make their work much easier. <https://www.adirondackexpress.com/goodsell-museum-receives-new-scanning-system>

Swede: Swede Mt Fire Tower was in the news. We greatly appreciate all of the time and effort of all involved behind the scenes for many months now to get this project moving forward. https://poststar.com/news/local/warren-county-seeks-to-reopen-long-closed-fire-tower-in/article_3f6bc430-e32d-5734-930a-893084199304.html

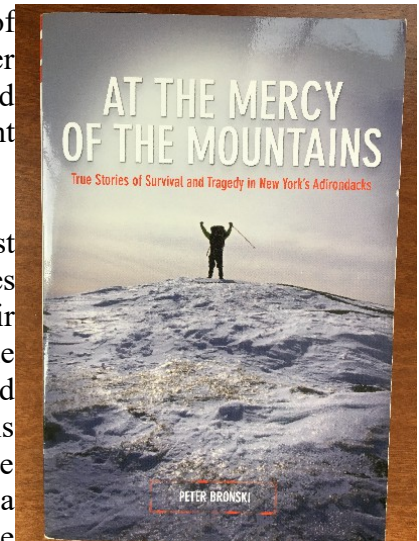
Have you ordered your Smokey Bear merchandise to give away at your tower this year? Smokey turns 75 on August 9th! Help him celebrate.

January trivia question: Only two individuals in the US have their own zip codes. One receives up to 13,000 letters a week. Who are these individuals? The answer is Smokey Bear and the President! We had several winners and all received an FFLA Sticker! Fred, Rick M, Bill H and Paul – thanks for playing along!

February Trivia: A tree was installed in Smokey's enclosure. What did it dispense?



Book of the month: At the Mercy of the Mountains: True Stories of Survival and Tragedy in New York's Adirondack Mountains by Peter Bronski. A very interesting book that discusses several Search and Rescue missions as well as some of what went wrong and what went right.



That brings me to something that has been in the news a lot this past month, our current NYS Ranger Force and the need for more. What does that have to do with fire towers? When observers became obsolete, their work as public relations representatives and educators was added to the Forest Ranger workload. Currently with an increase in visitors and acreage within the forest preserve. As a frequent hiker on the trails within the Forest Preserve, it has become a very uncommon site for me to see a Forest Ranger with the exception of seeing them as part of a SAR mission. Patrol time is very limited Forest Ranger workloads have become very lopsided with more and more time spent on Search and Rescue missions. In response to that, Forest Rangers spoke before the State Legislator <http://www.adirondackdailyenterprise.com/news/local-news/2019/01/legislators-asked-to-add-forest-rangers/>. Despite the concerns raised by many, the powers that be feel there is no need for more rangers. <https://www.northcountrypublicradio.org/news/story/37970/20190205/cuomo-apos-s-dec-commissioner-digs-in-says-more-adirondack-rangers-not-needed> and <http://www.dec.ny.gov/press/116075.html> What do you think?

How did they get a fire tower to the top of a mountain a hundred years ago? We are fortunate to have a first hand account of transporting the steel to Balsam Lake in 1919 by Russ Todd. *“The steel had been shipped by rail freight to Arkville, unloaded and trucked to the barn on the Seager place for storage. This was early winter and the road to the tower was impassable. In early summer the people gathered one beautiful morning at 6:30 am to load and transport the tower. The loading took much longer than was estimated as many of the bundles had to be broken down to properly distribute the load over the 7 lumber wagons. Routing was down Dry Brook to the Stuart Turn then up Millbrook Rd to the Beaverkill Rd thence to the Balsam Mountain cut off. I was riding with Joe and we were the last to leave at 11. Our load was the sections of sheet metal which made the house on top of the tower. The roofing sheets were so large that about 4 ft of each sheet overhung the side of the wagon. We encountered no trouble until the second wagon hit the first steep pitch on Woodpecker ridge of the Beaverkill Road. The load was so heavy that it was necessary to put the second team on it to get to the top of the pitch. To do this we had to unhook a team and put them in tandem with the team that was stuck. We had anticipated this and came prepared with log chains, ropes, picks, axes, saws and extra doubletrees. The next trouble spot was the steep pitch by the spring where you leave Woodpecker Ridge and go on to Judson Ridge, here we had to double team 3 loads. We hit no more trouble until we tried to negotiate the Balsam Cut-off. This was trouble all the way. The turns were too short and the grades too steep. It was necessary to remove rocks, cut down trees in order to make the turns and 2 of the pitches were so steep that we had to use 3 teams in tandem to get the loads up. Joe and I had the most trouble, our load was so wide that it was ketching on the trees on the side of the road. This happened to us twice on the Beaverkill road but the horses were good and would stand while we cut down the offending tree. It happened to us twice on the Balsam Cut Off but the horses were getting nervous and we had to unhook while we cut down the trees and rehook. Joe and I finally got to the top about 5pm. We left for home about 6:30. In coming down we took the short cut from Millbrook Rd directly to Furlow Lodge arriving home about 8pm, very glad to be back tired but no injuries.”* Next month you will read a similar story about how restoration work was done at Balsam Lake Mountain.

Calendar

Saturday, June 15, 2019 at 9:00 am the Friends of Mt Arab trail work day with the Adirondack Mountain Club will take place. This will be similar to last year – cleaning water bars and perhaps doing one of the short trail re-routes if time allows. Anyone interested should sign up at the ADK website: <https://www.adk.org/workshops-and-special-events/>

Tuesday, July 16, 2019 The Town of Horicon Historical Society in Brant Lake will be holding a Meet the Forest Rangers event.

Friday, August 2, 2019 – Sunday, August 4, 2019 will be the Centennial Celebration for Balsam Lake Mountain. Events will be held at Morgan Outdoors in Livingston Manor on August 2nd, at the summit on August 3rd and at the Dry Brook Community Hall on August 4th.

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.

Tuesday, August 13, 2019 the The Town of Horicon Historical Society in Brant Lake will be holding an Adirondack History talk by Historian, Mark Friden.

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 Mount Tremper Fire House in Mount Tremper

Here is the speakers line up, for Saturday, June 8th

Ed Engelman will discuss The NYS and National Register of Historic Places Why & How to apply plus historic resources for Fire Towers in New York. Doug Fitzgerald will be discussing the changing of cross braces on a fire tower. Ray Grimes from the NJ FFLA Chapter will discuss how they continue to use fire towers in spotting smoke. Ryan Trapani Executive Director of the Catskill Forest Association will discuss Defining Forestry in the 21st Century. George Profous NYSDEC Forester will discuss the beginning of the Catskill Fire Tower Project. PA FFLA Chapter Director Dan Bubnis will discuss why and how Pennsylvania is returning fire towers to active service. Barry Knight will discuss how to pick a fire tower out of a field and put it up on your own property.

In addition we will serve breakfast and lunch and visit fire towers. Would you or your group like to have a table at the conference? If so, please let me know. There is no cost associated with this, but it must be fire tower related. A separate invitation will be coming soon.

Laurie Rankin, Director
New York State Chapter
Forest Fire Lookout Association
lauriejrankin@gmail.com
ffla.org