



**Forest Fire Lookout Association
New York State Chapter
February 2020**

February can be a month for rodents or romance or both. But I am finding the best thing about February is Opportunities! Opportunities to help out fire towers, to offer your opinion, to earn a patch are all yours for the taking!

Did you notice our new anniversary logo? The first opportunity to consider is taking a trip in September to Klamath Falls Oregon. That is where the FFLA will be celebrating it's 30th anniversary the last weekend in September – what an opportunity for a trip with fellow fire tower enthusiasts! Keep an eye on the website and here for details as it all comes together.

I hope that my thoughts here will cause you to reflect and perhaps take the opportunity to make some comments yourself. If you would like to share a time when you took an opportunity to correct something, I will include it in next months newsletter.

An “opportunity to make corrections” or a “if you see something, say something” opportunity is what I would like to discuss. The first opportunity to make a correction is to make one of my own – please see the error I made in last month's trivia question under January trivia below.

Trivia question for January: *“Half of the tower at the Adirondack History Museum in Elizabethtown is made from the Hamilton Fire Tower. What other tower was use to make the complete tower you see today at the museum? Hint – some of it will celebrate a century in 2020. A Centennial Fire Tower Patch to the winner(s).”* It should have read, a Hamilton County Fire Tower.....Half of the tower at the Adirondack History Museum in Elizabethtown will celebrate a century in 2020. West and Kempshall fire towers make up the tower at the Adirondack History Museum and West would have been 100 this year. More people seem to respond when there is a correction needed. Jack, Fred, Lori Ann, Randy and Paul all took the opportunity to play along – thank you! And thank you for the corrections! Those who wanted one, all got a centennial patch!

Written publications that have arrived in my mailbox of late also had errors that needed correction. The December 2019 Conservationist magazine on page 40 mentions the new Upper Esopus Fire Tower. I sent the following - “While this tower was in service for fire spotting in the State of Florida before being restored and moved to NYS, it has not been used for fire spotting purposes in NYS. Your magazine states the tower 'represents a legacy of DEC forest rangers' but makes no mention of the Fire Tower Observers who staffed fire towers throughout New York State. My hope is that your magazine will make every effort to accurately represent the history of fire towers in NYS as you celebrate the 50th anniversary of the DEC. That history should include noting the important role Fire Tower Observers played in fire prevention throughout NYS.” We love NYS Forest Rangers, but Fire Tower Observers manned the towers in New York State. If the DEC magazine does not include them, who will? Please take the opportunity to speak up and make sure Observers are not forgotten! Response - “Thank you for your comments. Your message has been shared with the editorial team for review.”

I also saw this video about a trip to Stillwater Fire Tower on the Pure Adirondacks web page. While this was a great video that promoted a hike to Stillwater in winter, I also took the opportunity to speak up about my concerns regarding the dog on the map table and what I thought were microspikes on the tower. The owner answered me, “The dog slightly resting on the map table is still a puppy and his owner definitely had a good hold on him to prevent a full weight bearing. We definitely wouldn’t want to cause any damage to the tower. I’m always keeping responsible recreation on my mind and how certain shots would be perceived by others.” I took the opportunity to speak up. If you see something please take the opportunity to politely speak up.



<https://www.facebook.com/pureadirondacks/videos/548480202678759/?t=0>



The ADK Magazine, *Adirondac* January-February 2020 issue had a trip report that included a photo of a fire tower. However it was not correctly titled. I took the opportunity to write and say, “*I was sorry to see the incorrect information on your inside photo caption of the Jackie Jones fire tower. The Jackie Jones fire tower in Harriman State Park was incorrectly listed as the Jenny Jump fire tower. If space allows, a correction would be appreciated.*” I received a prompt response - “Be assured we will happily correct it in our March-April issue.” They also shared this photo which clearly shows an opportunity that a Friends group may have to use some of their funds to hire a professional crew. “During summer 2019, an ADK Professional Trail Crew replaced deteriorating steps from the Azure Mt. fire tower to

a popular nearby viewpoint. The new steps are made of rock and will be much more durable and erosion-resistant than their earth-and-wood predecessors. The project was made possible by a generous grant from Parks & Trails New York. Azure Mountain Friends expresses its appreciation to both organizations for their involvement.” Photo credit: Joe Berner

Job Opportunities

Blue Mountain Fire Tower Summit Steward \$11.50/hr – Seasonal Position during Summer 2020
Application Deadline: 2/29/2020 or First 50 Applicants. If you are interested, let me know and I can send you the job description and further details.

Hadley Mt Fire Tower Committee: We are already thinking about summer! Our search for our 2020 summit guide has begun. For more details on job description and how to apply, visit our website and check under Current News! <http://hadleymtfiretower.org/>

Trivia for February: We often see lookouts in the west accessed by horseback. How many currently standing fire towers in NYS have marked horse trails to their summits? Can you name them? A Centennial Patch to the winner!

Opportunities to help out fire towers and cabins this summer: *Note this is all volunteer work

Lyon Mountain Fire Tower Trail work June 13-14 and Sept 19-20

Pillsbury Fire Tower work July 25-26, Aug 1-2, Aug 8-9

Kane Observer's cabin Oct 3-4

Blue Observer's cabin May 2-3, May 9-10

Vandewhacker Observer's cabin (with ADK 46ers*) – July 11-12, July 25-26, Aug 8-9

Poke O Moonshine trail (with ADK 46ers*)– Aug 1-2

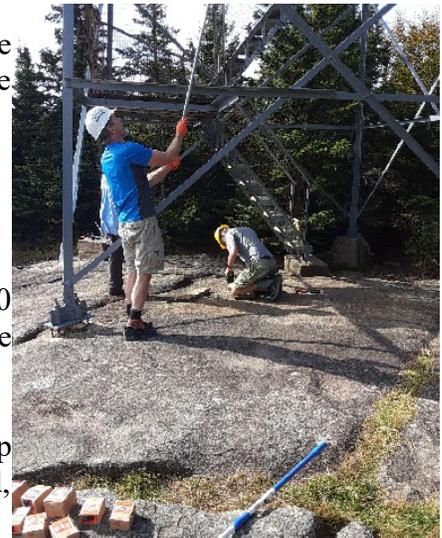
*with ADK 46ers work, you can sign up on their web page and you do not have to be a 46er to participate: <http://www.adk46er.org/trail-crew.html>

Please take note of these dates and think about lending a hand on one or two projects – we would love to have you and promise it will be fun!

Opportunities are available for Volunteer Stewards at the following fire towers

Mount Tremper: Mount Tremper is seeking new volunteers for 2020 and a new volunteer Coordinator starting in 2021. If interested, please contact Mark at tremperfiretower01@gmail.com

Sterling: Susan shared she will also be looking for volunteers to help out at the Fire tower for the next season. If anyone is interested, please email Susan at sterlingfiretower01@gmail.com.



Challenge Opportunity: An opportunity to increase our membership on social media was given last month “Let your friends know we will be giving a free one year membership to the FFLA to the 500th member to join this group! And if you are the one who recommended them, we'll send you a patch!” It only took a couple of hours and we hit #500 on our facebook page. Thanks to all who shared our page and all who joined that page. Joshua was the winner of the one year membership to FFLA and Yana was the winner of the patch! Now I have to think of a similar challenge for membership. We are fast approaching 100 members. Stay tuned.

Book of the month: Final entry of *Towerman*, by Chris Saunders, as our book of the month. From *Adirondack Life* May/June 1995 (Part 3)

About twenty-five Scotts, representing several generations, trooped up the peak carrying wicker picnic baskets. They trickled in most of the morning, with the patriarch of the clan appearing last. Once he had arrived, (and stopped grumbling), they laid out a giant blanket and emptied their baskets. After filling up on their catered food and wine I magnanimously offered to answer their questions.

There were other times when generous impulses came from an entirely different direction. Many kindly souls - obviously affected by the altitude – offered to hook me up with their daughter or niece or granddaughter, or their best friend's daughter or niece or granddaughter. I assumed I was perceived as a good catch because I dashed up a mountain four days a week to save trees and help confused tourists. And confused many of them were.

One August day when the heat was shimmering off the mountains a hiker came up the tower to tell me that an overweight couple needed help. I got kind of excited. If they needed more help than I could muster the state might send a helicopter. (I had always wanted to see a chopper land on my mountain.) I thought I was in luck when I saw them. Sweat was pouring off the man's red face. His black t-shirt clung to a massive stomach that rose and fell with each difficult breath. The woman was pale and clammy but conscious. She was studying a crumpled copy of a map.

"Where's the Green Trail?" the woman asked between gasps.

"The Green Trail?" I said There's only one trail up Blue, it isn't green.

"Here", she said, pointing to the map. "Castle Rock, isn't it?"

Now, Castle Rock is an inconsequential hump overlooking Blue Mountain Lake. It is also on the other side of the road entirely. They had gone fifteen hundred vertical feet out of their way. When I told them that, they turned plum purple and left before I could ask them if they needed help. And so I never got see a helicopter land on my mountain, despite the fact that some visitors thought my commute included a flight to the top each morning.

I made that four-mile hike more than thirty times. I don't smoke; I suspect I'm at my physical peak. My best times were a respectable forty minutes up and twenty-five minutes down, well below the three-hour-round-trip average of the tourists. However, one morning on my way up a woman blew past me, already on her way down. It was Peggy Purdue, the legendary wife of Indian Lake's town supervisor. She is sixty-something wears a leg brace, uses ski poles, and can still make the climb in forty minutes. I once heard her complain that she was getting old, because she used to do it in thirty minutes. As she zoomed down the trail, I thought that, yes, ma'am, we all do slow down eventually.

Blue Mountain looks like a deceptively easy hike from the highway, but the last mile is straight up the bedrock. Greg George, the local ranger, estimates that a third of the people who sign the trail register don't make it all the way. Those who do are usually rewarded with a fine view – except during the season I spent there. I had a total of four gorgeous days, seven nice days with some haze and a nine pretty good days with clouds. The remainder were wet and cold and sunless, with cloud banks shrouding the summit that reduced visibility to mere yards. At least it never snowed.

This peak is the first big obstacle in the way of any weather pattern from the west, and most Adirondack weather comes from that direction. So if it was going to storm anywhere, it would storm on my mountain. The wind would blow, the air would become hard to breathe, and the rain would start, often accompanied by lightning. An all-steel forty foot tower on top of a 3759 foot peak is not the safest place to be in a thunderstorm, but I was relatively lucky that summer. The closest lightning strike hit a hundred yards away from me. Then there was one family that was particularly lucky, despite the fact they were up on the tower when a bolt hit.

With a storm brewing I had closed the tower and herded visitors to an abandoned observer's cabin just inside the treeline. And then I heard voices. No, it couldn't be, I thought. No one's that stupid. But, in fact, they were. I ran back to the tower and found a family of six climbing the stairs.

"Excuse me", I said, "but I've closed the tower down because of the storm."

"The kids just wanted to see the view," the father said.

It was pouring, there was no view. Then the lightning struck. I hit the ground. They screamed. Seconds later we were all huddled in the cabin.

When the weather was good the mountains were picture postcards and it was my job to tell the tourists what they were seeing. And there were times, a precious few, when I had the mountains to myself, such as one particular morning in July.

The peace had returned, and I was alone after having greeted more than a hundred people that day. In the calm I suddenly noticed the whispering of the breeze through the balsams and the warmth of the sun. I climbed down the tower and took a seat on the bare rock of the summit. I was exhausted.

But before long my eyes sprang open at the sound of muffled voices.

“There it is, I see it!”, a voice cried.

Dazed, I jumped from my granite bed and scrambled up the tower. Napping was not in my job description.

A woman emerged from the trees. She was wearing white knee-high socks, long khaki shorts and glasses the size and thickness of windowpanes. Even from forty feet up she looked ridiculous.

“Hello up there,” she called to me.

Two teenage boys shuffled out of the trees behind her. They sighed and collapsed, clearly out of their element.

Then a man with a huge beer belly lumbered from the forest.

My god, I thought, it's the Griswolds from National Lampoon's Vacation.

The tower shook as mom began climbing the stairs. Her family wouldn't budge, but, undaunted, she continued on her ascent.

She popped her head through the hatch.

“Is this the summit?” she asked.

I shook my head. “You still have a few hundred feet of climbing to go.”

Disappointed but resolute, she looked at where her family was sprawled.

“Oh”, she said simply, and climbed back down the tower, determined to get to the top of Big Blue.

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