



**Forest Fire Lookout Association
New York State Chapter
December 2021**

I generally begin our newsletter with a mention of our Facebook page photo contest winner, but the photo contest never happened this month. As can often be the case, December is a busy time of the year and it also happens that I did not have photo contest written on my calendar. So I simply forgot. I apologize for that. We will begin the contest again on January 1st and sincerely hope that many will continue to participate. Meanwhile, a favorite photo of mine that is fitting for this time of year is seen here. I took this in early 2018 just a few steps before arriving in the clearing at the Blue Mt Fire Tower, an amazing and natural site. I hope you enjoy the photo.



Meanwhile, several photos from New York State are in the annual FFLA calendar! Congratulations to all of the winners. This calendar is truly a must have work of art for the fire tower lovers out there. It will not arrive in time for Christmas, but it will likely arrive in time for the new year and it supports FFLA: https://www.zazzle.com/forest_fire_lookout_association_calendar_2022-158146822282684536

Another piece of national news that was shared from our friends at Camp Amahami (where privately owned Page Pond fire tower is well taken care of) is about fire towers in Minnesota. State Chapter Chair Dave Quam is featured in this great story about restoration. The piece is very interesting and features some fantastic photos too!

<https://www.npr.org/sections/pictureshow/2021/11/28/1051888803/see-how-minnesota-fire-towers-help-preserve-a-5-000-year-old-bog>

Want to show your friends a WOW? Have them check out this video, but know that it is not for the faint of heart! <https://fstoppers.com/drone/epic-views-secluded-fire-lookout-587648>

Back in New York State, SUNY ESF, who manages the Goodnow Fire Tower, gives us a nice mention and is very appreciative of all of the donations to date. If you can help get this cab reopened, it would be wonderful! <https://www.esf.edu/development/donors/2021/fire-tower.asp>

Visitors to our NY State Chapter Web Page <http://NYSFFLA.org> page – 3700+ visitors for 2021. Keep browsing, we have lots of great information.

What's open – What's closed

Balsam Lake: Seasonal road closure for southern approach from Beaverkill Road.

Goodnow: Cab remains closed. Trail is open.

Gore: Trail closed for the ski season.

Jackie Jones: Cab remains closed. Trails are open.

Pillsbury: Old Military Road - Access is closed for the season.

Red Hill: Seasonal road closure for Dinch Rd approach.

Spruce: Has reopened following annual hunting season closure.

Stillwater: Tower will reopen on December 21st.

Swede: Has reopened following annual hunting season closure.

Mt Tremper: Seasonal road closure for Jessup road approach.

Wakely: Road closed for the season until snow depth allows for snowmobile use only.

****Inform yourself of parking areas that may or may not be plowed and plan accordingly.

Calendar 2022

Saturday, January 1: First Day hikes sponsored by NYSDEC and NYS Parks. Some of the hikes are to fire towers or former fire tower sites. Be sure to refresh your browser for the most up to date list. <https://www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/112174.html>

Saturday, January 22: Snowshoe Mammal Tracking with naturalist/outdoor educator Elizabeth Lee. Meet at 9:30am at the Observers trailhead. Be ready for 2-3 hours in the cold, following and identifying mammal tracks in the snow. In cooperation with CATS: champlainareatrails.com. Sign-up required, minimum of 6 participants.

Saturday, January 29: Back Country Ski Exploration. Meet at the Observers trailhead at 9:30am to explore the trails on the west side of Poke-O. David Thomas-Train will lead this trip for skiers with at least intermediate skills, to manage some steep, narrow terrain. Arduous, 3-4 hours. In cooperation with CATS: champlainareatrails.com.

May 2022: Work on Blue Mountain

May 2022: Work on Buck Mountain****

Saturday, September 17: Sterling Forest Celebration

****An exciting project will be happening as soon as the weather allows in the spring. We will be working with a fire tower contractor and local municipalities to assist them in their plan to reopen the Buck Mt Fire Tower in the spring. If you can lend a hand it would be wonderful! Remember this area is private property and is not yet open! Please respect the private property and do not do anything to jeopardize the reopening plan. <https://www.hamiltoncountynynews.com/2021/06/new-fire-tower-for-hikers-in-hamilton.html?m=1>

Help wanted: Have you ever wanted a summer internship on top of a mountain? The Hadley Mountain Fire Tower Committee is looking to fill their 2022 summer steward position. To find out more about the position, email us at hadleymtfiretowercommittee@gmail.com.

We are very grateful to all of the contributors on our Facebook page. Last year at this time we had 746 members there, today we have 1038! Long time FFLA member, Bob Eckler has been looking through his photographs and often stumping people with his Mystery Monday photos. We appreciate all of his contributions. Past NYS Chapter Director, Fred Knau's weekly Throwback Thursday post is greatly appreciated. To give you an example, this week he profiled Red Hill fire tower in the Catskills.

I first heard of this tower in the summer of 1983 when I was in the observer's cab at Blue Mountain with the observer, I believe Gil Goodnough and his lovely dog, and when I was talking to him the radio lit up with chatter from other towers. I asked him what was going on or something like that, and his reply was, "Nothing around here. There's action down in the southern Catskills by Red Hill."

Red Hill is, in my book a mountain, located in the Town of Denning in south-western Ulster County. The Hill's elevation is 2,990 ft., making it one of the lesser mountains of the Catskill Park and perhaps why it was given the term "Hill".

*During the late 19-teens, the NYS Conservation Commission realized that with the closure of the Slide Mountain observation station, many of the south-western Catskill mountains south-facing sides were not under any observation by the other fire towers to the north. The High Point fire tower was around 18 miles distant to Red Hill, and even some of its view into the Roundout and Neversink Valley areas were obscured. Thus, by the end of 1919, the Conservation Commission had authorized the purchase of a new steel fire tower to be erected on a summit in the vicinity of the southwestern Catskills. That tower went up on Red Hill, but the "why there?" still has me puzzled. Anyone who has ever hiked up Red Hill on a clear day and climbed the tower will see that much of its view to the south-west is blocked by a ridge-like mountain called Denman Mountain. Denman Mountain is only 60 or so feet taller than Red Hill, but that 60-odd feet leads to a large wall where the observer can not see the lands bordering the Forest Preserve where more population, and thus, risk, occurs. If I had my selection, I would have placed the tower atop Denman, but there must have been a reason that summit was not selected. Perhaps it was objections from the landowners. Perhaps someone knows and will chime in here.**

The area that the Red Hill tower covered had no railroads running through. The greatest threats to these forests weren't the railroad, but the lumberman, the berry picker, and the refuse & brush-burner. The area is also where the Atlantic coastal climate and its winds run into the weather from northern PA and tend to push those clouds a little more northeast, meaning that the area receives more sunshine and would dry quicker and fire danger rise faster than other places in the Catskill Park. To protect from these threats, the 60-foot LS-40 Aermotor fire tower was erected atop the Hill in the spring and early summer of 1920. A rough road was established to bring the tower up and that road was also used to bring up the materials for the construction of a rough cabin which was completed in 1920. A 3-mile-long telephone line was constructed to tie into the established lines for connection to the District Ranger's offices.

The Red Hill tower opened in mid-July 1920, and in that year, and every year it was in use, detected at least one fire. The first-year observer, Adelbert Murray, located and reported 3 fires and 356 visitors. The rest of the years through the 1920's, between ten and twenty fires were spotted each year. In 1930, Observer Edward Lewis began working at Red Hill and worked there for the next twenty-five years. After his first year, he watched the workers of the Conservation Department come up and construct a new observer's cabin which remains atop the summit to this day. In 1935 and then again in 1941, Observer Lewis spotted and reported more than 100 fires in a year. This tower was so valuable that the tower remained staffed through the Great Depression and through the entire World War II. Observer Lewis lost his job and position in the spring of 1955. This loss was directly related to the

1954 Gubernatorial election when new Democratic Governor W. Averell Harriman selected Louis H. Wehle as Director of the Conservation Department. Mr. Wehle, a Democrat, removed three of the Catskill observers, all who were long-time observers & Republicans, and replaced them with party-faithful Democrats. Per the Catskill Mountain News, this was the first-time political appointments were utilized in selection of forest fire observers. Elmer Schultz, who worked the tower prior to Mr. Lewis' tenure, was re-appointed to the position and only worked one year. Following his resignation, the tower remained closed for the 1956 fire year.

The fire tower was restaffed in 1957 and remained staffed until the 1990 fire season when Red Hill was one of five fire towers staffed and the only one outside of the Adirondack Park. In the time between the 1960's and 1990's, the observer's worked with the airplane flying the Ellenville aerial route using the Conservation Department's two-way radio system. When 1990's fire season ended, Observer Don Wood closed the tower cab and observer's cabin for the last time, completing his eighteen years of service at Red Hill.

Through the tower's 49-year time when formal records were recorded, Red Hill had reported 1,443 fires (avg. 29 per year) & 32,609 visitors (avg. 665 per yr). This explains quite well why Captain Ray Wood was dismayed with the tower's closing more than the others that closed in 1988 (not by his choosing).

In 1991, the DEC began making estimates of what it would cost to take the fire towers down. Red Hill, per Captain Wood, came in at \$ 7,500, and this tower was one with a road to get it off the mountain quite easily. As the State was in a budget crisis at that time, the probability of the tower coming down anytime soon was small, and as time played out, the tower remained in relatively good shape with little abuse through the 1990's.

In the mid to late 1990's, after hearing about the preservation efforts at Blue Mountain, Mr. George Elias and his wife Helen, began working with the Region 3 office and DEC Central to obtain approval to form a group to preserve the Red Hill tower. He certainly made the FFLA aware of this effort, which we supported quite positively. That effort quickly spread to the other four Catskill Mountain towers. Many hands were involved in those restorations, but George was their conductor, and today, the Red Hill tower, like the others, is in near pristine shape and each is staffed each summer with open cabs to obtain those wonderful views and stewards to assist the inquisitive. One of the gestures that he and the Red Hill committee have done, which shows their top-notch character, was the planting of a tree and plaque mounting for the last Red Hill observer, Don Wood, which was installed after his passing near the old Dinch Road trailhead. We hope this wonderful tribute tree will grow tall and remain a long time...just like the Red Hill tower that he and the Elias's loved so much.

Thank you Fred! A footnote to this post from Doug Hamilton, Red Hill Fire Tower Committee Chair - *"In reference to why the tower was placed on Red Hill instead of Denman Mt., I seem to remember reading or hearing from someone, that where to place the tower became a political football between Sullivan and Ulster counties. Red Hill being in Ulster County and Denman in Sullivan. A tower on Denman Mt. would have been a much better choice as it would have provided a broader view and quite easy to build a road to the summit." Doug also says that George's wife Helen was the real driving force in making the restoration of Red Hill happen.*

For those who enjoyed this, check out Fred's column each Thursday on our Facebook page!

What you can Do

As I look back to one year ago, we were hoping that 2021 would be a better year and the pandemic would allow us to do good work on fire towers, fire tower trails and Observer's cabins. We certainly did! With the help of many, many volunteers and with the help of your donations and membership dues, we accomplished much and we did so safely. Swede Mt Fire Tower and Berry Hill Fire Tower both re-opened! Major work projects at Blue Mt Lake and Kane Observer's cabins were completed. Work at Pillsbury Fire Tower was completed – we await the radio crew next. Another successful lighting project was accomplished!

I would like to ask for your help in 2022 to do even more. Here are a few things for your consideration.

We are a member based organization. This means that our members are the heart and soul of all that we do. Most people think a member is just someone who pays dues. Not so for our organization. Consider all that we do and how you can help out please.

We are a very small organization and we don't have a paid marketing department. Can I ask you to please let your friends on Facebook, your relatives and your co-workers know about the NYS Chapter of the FFLA? They may be interested in what we do and they may be interested in supporting us. Give us a 'SHARE out' please!

In 2022 would you please consider joining us for a work project? We have many different skill sets that are needed on a project. We could use someone to provide a snack, someone who can manage a paint brush, someone with carpentry skills, someone who can snip brush that is growing into a trail, someone who can clear leaves out of a water bar, sand a door and more! You can help even if you think you can't.

In 2021, we provided volunteer fire tower stewards for two different fire towers; Stillwater and Berry Hill. The opportunity that the stewards have to provide historical information and educational information is invaluable! Much like an Observer did in the past, this important public relations piece is worth its weight in gold. In 2022, we would like to expand that steward presence to Kane and Jackie Jones fire towers. We provide you with the necessary training, schedules, and a really cool shirt too! We could use more stewards at both Stillwater and Berry Hill as well! A tremendous shout out of thanks to those who did this in 2021!

In 2021, we had 3 different volunteer groups who became Affiliates! St. Regis, Friends of Stissing, and Azure Mt Friends have all joined this level. This opportunity is available to all of the fire tower groups around NYS. It allows you to affiliate with our national organization and its resources and reputation. It allows the use of our logo and can assist you in grant awards. It is free, so please consider becoming an affiliate in 2022.

Behind the scenes: As you can imagine with all of the different work projects, stewards, monthly newsletter, web pages, social media and more there is much that goes on behind the scenes. We can always use people who are willing to lend a hand in this regard.

Your membership dues is what helps us to provide a hot or cold beverage to our wonderful volunteers at the end of a work day, to purchase tools for them to work with, to maintain our web page and more. If you have not officially joined our Chapter, would you please consider doing so? We keep the dues quite affordable at just \$15 per year and you can join on line: <http://ffla.org/learn-more--join.html>

Holiday shopping: I hope you purchased some hats, patches, t-shirts, books and more from your favorite fire tower groups this holiday season? What great gifts these items make and what a great way to support your favorite group and their good work!

Ampersand: Historical profile from John Sasso on Ampersand Mt: An in-depth paper about a former fire tower mountain and its importance <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1DlMeqQVl6rGw7K77HsRab-uxQTWpfzab/view>

Graffiti Arrest: The NYSDEC Report of the graffiti arrest was to go to court on December 15th. As of the writing of this newsletter, I have not heard the results of that court date.

Twenty Twenty Two is shaping up to be an exciting year with the possibility of 4 new fire tower openings or re-openings, depending on many factors. We also expect to continue our good work with several projects, stewardship programs and to support friends groups throughout New York State. I hope 2022 will be an exciting and healthy year for you and your family as well.

I will leave you with *Merry Christmas* from William Chapman White, referenced in the article below and included in *The Forest Rangers* by Lou Curth: <https://suncommunitynews.com/news/22935/a-classic-adirondack-christmas-story-notes-from-the-north-woods/> It begins with:

“John Roberts is a Ranger. For 40 years he has watched over what he calls his trees. A few days before Christmas John came out of the woods following a human trail. It had started at a freshly cut white spruce stump. The heavy footprints turned down toward a bleak, unpainted house

.... and concludes with ...

Two nights later the Ranger was in town shopping when he met the Carsons on Main Street.

“Glad I met you”, Joe told him. “The darndest thing happened after you left the other day. People came from all over to buy those puppies, I musta’ sold seven.”

“That’s fine, “ John said. “News sure does get around fast up here in the backwoods. Well, Merry Christmas, Joe!” “I’ll say, Joe answered, “Merry Christmas!”

While a work of fiction, it is a favorite holiday story of kindness from a Forest Ranger. We may all know such a Forest Ranger or a Fire Tower Observer who resembles the one in the story.

May the Christmas holiday be filled with kindness for each of you.

Laurie

Photo at right Ampersand Fire Tower 1957 from the Paul Hartmann collection

