



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



A popular song includes a line, “The skies of November turn gloomy”, but this month's photo contest winner certainly shows a bright blue November sky at Hurricane Fire Tower. The winning photograph was submitted by Jennifer Scott and was taken in November of 2020. Jennifer's photo will be our new cover photo on the State Chapter Facebook page until December 10th. Congratulations to Jennifer and thank you to all of you who submitted photos and voted!



We have had a nice mix of gloomy skies and blue skies thus far this fall. Plenty of precipitation has fallen but that has not stopped Steve Mackey from his work at the beginning of the Swede Mt. Fire Tower Trail. *please note – Steve has done this work with permission when the trail was closed as it was right at the very beginning of the trail only. Steve said, “My latest project is building steps on the beginning of the Swede Mountain trail. A couple of my friends helped last week and we put in some rock steps, switchbacks, and big rocks to cross the stream. Today, I built wooden steps. One flight down, three to go.” Steve finished those steps off November 15th, an amazing amount of work and huge difference for all made by just one person. Warren County supplied the materials, Steve the knowledge and the labor. Thank you so very much Steve! If you would like to lend a hand in the spring with some other work, please let me know. Photos by Steve Mackey.

This past month a disturbing incident occurred that involved graffiti on a lean-to in the Catskills. I report it here because it is one of the very few times that we have seen someone ticketed for graffiti and defacing public property. This news article does mention Bald Mt Fire Tower trail, but there is no mention of graffiti in fire towers. We all know it happens, we report it here often and we spend a lot of time and money painting over it. And quite frankly when all 4 walls inside a fire tower are covered in graffiti it is the same size as what was done on the lean-to. Rocks near fire tower summits have been “tagged” in many locations. <https://www.timesunion.com/news/article/Spray-paint-graffiti-comes-to-the-wilderness-and-16593389.php?IPID=Times-Union-HP-CP-Spotlight> From the NYSDEC Ranger Report: 11-10-21 Ranger Report Town of Lexington Greene County **Graffiti Arrest:** *On Nov. 2, DEC Central Dispatch received a call about a social media post showing graffiti on a lean-to on State lands at Hunter Mountain. Rangers Fox and Dawson began an investigation with DEC's Bureau of Environmental Crimes Investigation (BECI). On Nov. 4, Lt. Pachan and Ranger Dawson received information that the suspect was currently at the John Robb lean-to attempting to clean up the graffiti. Rangers Fox and Dawson responded to the scene and notified BECI investigators. Rangers learned that the subject drove up the mountain on Hunter ski resort roads and got stuck in a snowbank at the top of the Kaatskill Flyer chairlift. Ski resort staff and Ranger Dawson freed the vehicle from the snowbank, and the Officers escorted the subject down to the ski lodge where they met responding BECI investigators. The 39-year-old Brooklyn man was arrested and transported to the New York State Police (NYSPP) barracks in Hunter. He was charged with a Class A misdemeanor for making graffiti and violations for defacing rock and natural materials on state land and defacing a DEC structure. The suspect is due back in court on Dec. 15.* My sincere hope is that two things come out of this incident. One – I hope this person does get a reasonable sentence in court. Two – I hope that sentence is widely reported on. Perhaps if both of those things happen, we will have some visitors who will think before they do this in the future. Photos from NYSDEC.



The National FFLA does an annual photo contest on their Facebook page. The winning photos are organized into a calendar and that calendar will be available for you to purchase. This year over 120 images were submitted for the contest, many from New York State. This is a great way to represent our state and to support the FFLA! Check in on their Facebook page and see who the winners are!

Fire Tower Closures: Please remember the following fire tower closures: Swede Fire Tower remains closed. It will reopen on December 16th. Stillwater fire tower trail is closed through December 20th and Spruce Fire Tower remains closed through December 6th.

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 have our third FFLA Affiliate! The Azure Mountain Friends group is one that has been very helpful to the FFLA over the years in many ways. They were one of the flagship groups to form and restore a fire tower in New York State. The group officially formed in 2001.

Trail and Maintenance: In addition to the fire tower restoration, the group also took on the trail maintenance. The trail is only a 2 mile round trip, but you do gain 900 feet in elevation! The steepness of the grade means the group must remain constantly vigilant to keep the trail in good repair. This is an often snowy area of the state and a wonderful snowshoe hike!

Education and Stewardship: Azure Mountain Friends is committed to not only the tower and trail work, but to providing education and stewardship on the mountain. They do this in a couple of ways. They have volunteer summit stewards and can mentor new ones with a veteran steward. They have developed a wonderful handbook to assist them in their work. That handbook is available for purchase on their web page and has been emulated by many other groups over the years. It provides those groups with a great deal of guidance.

Their steward scholarship program is one that can be done at any tower. All students come from local high schools. The students who are part of this program agree to steward at the tower for 5 days and write an essay about that experience. Those student stewards essays can be found in the annual newsletters. Reading them really gives one a feel for how much the time on the mountain has meant to these young people.

Lastly, the Azure mountain friends have a great connection to local schools who hold field trips on the mountain. There was a recent trip by Parishville-Hopkinton School's 3rd grade class. Photos on their Facebook page show dozens of smiles! At the time of their centennial celebration in 2018, the Friends invited students from local schools to provide art work about the fire tower. Those submissions were amazing! What a wonderful connection to the local school and community.

The fire tower turned 100 years old in 2018 and I had the opportunity to attend the fun and informative celebration. Once again, the group did an amazing job of connecting to the local community through their celebration and included school children's art work.

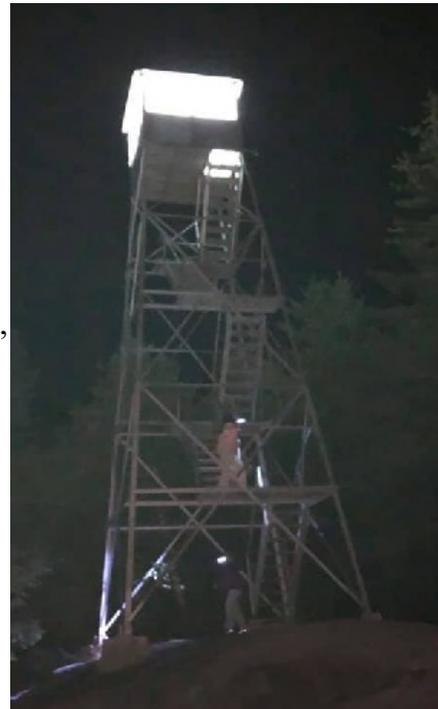


Their web page contains some great historical photos, information, and merchandise to support their work. Please take time to visit. <https://www.azuremountain.org/>

Fire Towers Part 3 to finish up lighting – I really appreciate all of the feedback from the Illuminators who make this event happen. A common one this year was quite simply that ½ hour is too short and perhaps too late as well! Harry P from Stillwater said “A half hour isn't enough time to do everything. Taking pictures, finding the other towers etc.” Fred Knauf, from Wakely said, “ I agree with Harry Peck that 9 to 9:30 is both too short and also too late. I would prefer the lighting start 15 minutes after sunset so that the tower's glow can be seen in the twilight and then the beacon shine in the darkness after dark. By 9 pm, many people are back in their cottages or off the roads and simply do not get to see the lights. A counter idea would be 8:30 to 9:30, which is how long I had Wakely lit. I could have lit it a good 15 minutes earlier - it was that dark up there.”



Left image, Blue,
by Jason Scott.



Right Image, Owl's Head,
By Maria Erdo



Left image,
Poke O Moonshine,
by Brad Kilbourne



Right Image, Mt. Arab,
by Laura Baker

Another suggestion was to use this opportunity to encourage people to join FFLA. Have you joined? <http://ffla.org/learn-more--join.html> These final photos illustrate a wonderful night!

Photos Left to Right, Swede by Tara Anne Pleat, Wakely Light arrangement by Fred Knauf, Hadley, by 'Dano83'



Old Ranger Stories: In case you missed it, the Paul Smith's Visitor Information Center's new Director, Retired Forest Ranger Scott van Laer held an Old Forest Ranger Stories discussion in late October. It was a great opportunity to listen in on some wonderful memories! The replay can be seen here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pF0wBIOO0sk> It is worth listening to every minute of it! Thanks for doing this Scott! There was also an additional article about the event you can read about here: <https://www.adirondackalmanack.com/2021/10/adirondack-reflections.html>

Calendar 2022

Saturday, January 22: Poke-O-Moonshine: 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: Poke-O: Back Country Ski Exploration. Meet at the Observers trailhead at 9:30 am to explore the trails. 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.

Saturday, September 17: Sterling Forest Celebration

Thankful for our Neighbors

In November I wanted to give a shout out to our friends and neighbors in the Northeast, a perfect time to give thanks for their support and to support them. Catfish fire tower in New Jersey participated in the Lighting Event, photo by Brandon Smith. In New Hampshire we participated in Flags on the 48 at Mount Hale this year. Hale is a former fire tower site. We also heard of the great work done at Cabot Observer's Cabin – photo from our friends, John and June. In Maine we had a chance to visit the Number 5 Fire Tower along with Beech Hill, Chase Hill and the former Sargent site. Our friends Pat and Deb Tebano recently visited Alander Observer's cabin in Massachusetts. There are towers to explore everywhere. Take the opportunity to do so when you travel around the northeast. Be thankful for the opportunity to continue to visit these special places. May you find much to be thankful for this November and enjoy a wonderful Thanksgiving! Laurie

