



**Forest Fire Lookout Association  
New York State Chapter  
October 2022**

Our monthly photo contest has returned! Our winner is Jim Kobak's photo of the former Belleyare Fire Tower site in the Catskills, taken in October of 2019, on a rather damp day I might add! Jim's photo got the most likes and is our new Facebook page cover photo until November. Congratulations to Jim and thanks to all who participated! Jim's photo fits right in with a special theme for this month's newsletter.



This month we are going to celebrate a special 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. In the Spring and Summer of 1997 the headlines read, "Fire Tower Restoration Project Underway." But it was not a simple project, it was the 5 Fire Towers in the Catskills; Balsam Lake, Hunter, Overlook, Red Hill and Tremper. These 5 towers are commonly referred to as the Catskill Fire Tower Project (CFTP). 25 years ago two very special people put together and supported this crazy idea: Helen Budrock of the Catskill Center for Conservation and Development, and George Profous, of the NYSDEC. Two organizations and two DEC Regions along with 5 fire towers was a significant undertaking. Along with dozens of local volunteers, this unique plan to place all 5 towers under one umbrella, the CFTP, was born.

It began with a group of people meeting, ranging from small local groups concerned for a tower in their neighborhood, to organizations such as the FFLA, the National Historic Register, the Audubon Society, and the Catskill Forest Association. According to the Catskill Lookouts Newsletter Number 1, the following people would lead each individual group; Paul Trotta of the DEC would lead Hunter, George and Helen Elias would lead Red Hill, Dana Dorrity would lead Tremper, George Profous would lead Overlook, and Karen Harris would lead Balsam Lake. <https://nysffla.org/history/catskills/1997-Spring-Summer-Catskill-Lookouts.pdf>

Local was the key word with the Friends groups for each tower still working as grass roots organizations in each of their local areas. Fund raising occurred and restoration plans were made. Lecture series were held. Through the winter of 1997 the groups continued to work toward their fund raising and restoration goals. According to the Number 2 issue of the Catskill Lookouts, short term goals included having a minimum of 2 towers opened within the year. Long Range goals included opening all the towers and the Observer's cabins as museums, and establishing a summit steward program. These were lofty goals for such a fledgling organization.

Fund raising dinners, festivals, wine tastings, patches, t-shirts, letter writing campaigns, concerts, and raffles were held. Meanwhile, engineering reports were completed and restoration efforts planned. By the Number 2 issue of the Catskill Lookouts the slogan "Five Towers for 2000" was employed to *"convey the urgent need to do something to save the towers immediately. Soon, repairs would be impossible, leaving extremely expensive replacement as the only option."* A big thanks was sent to the *"FFLA for their continued advice and help. Members from all of our neighboring states have come to New York to help make this program a success."*

And it was a success! Overlook Fire Tower reopened on June 5, of 1999. I do not have Number 3 of the Catskill Lookouts, but the Number 4 issue written in the winter of 2000 headline reads, “*one Down...Four more to go!*” The Number 5 issue was headlined “*The last fire tower reopens – are we done yet?*” Balsam Lake reopened June 3<sup>rd</sup> of 2000, Red Hill reopened July 15<sup>th</sup> of 2000, Hunter on October 17<sup>th</sup> of 2000 and Tremper June 9<sup>th</sup> of 2001. What a success!

Each of these issues of Catskill Lookouts relates the hard work done by volunteers. There were hundreds of them in each local community and beyond! They also knew their work was not really done, but would continue. Issue Number 5 states “*Looking ahead, one of the biggest challenges we are going to face in continuing this effort, is establishing a mechanism for ensuring the long term maintenance and upkeep of the tower and developing a steward program to educate the public.*”

Challenges do still remain, particularly regarding the maintenance of the towers after 25 years. Over time, policies have changed regarding the restoration and maintenance activities and the project is often hard pressed to get this done. Tower closures have occurred and will likely again in the future until policies are changed. Currently Tremper fire tower is looking for a leader and some volunteers.

Nonetheless, the beauty and strength of this plan has continued to work quite well for 25 years, thanks to the hard work and dedication of the hundreds of volunteers that have served each Catskill tower. Each separate tower (except Tremper at this time) continues to have a local following of volunteer stewards who staff the towers each weekend from Memorial Day to Columbus Day, an amazing feat. Thousands and thousands of hours have gone into this quarter century long program to provide this valuable service. It is perhaps the single most successful volunteer program in the Catskills.

We congratulate each grass roots group for their continued success with the project. These hearty volunteers have greeted tens of thousands of visitors in the last 25 years, providing them with various educational information about fire tower history, how to care for themselves and the surrounding forests, and more. Historically, public relations was a HUGE part of an Observer's job and today's educational efforts by the CFTP volunteer stewards are equally important.

The other thing to consider about the success of this project is the possible future use in spotting fires once again. From the November 25<sup>th</sup> 1960 issue of the Catskill Mt News comes the headline “FOREST FIRE SWEEPS UP SIDE OF MOUNTAIN”. This article talks about the Hanover Peak Blaze near Peekamoose being battled for 15 hours by 260 Firefighters, flames reportedly visible for 40 miles. Last month, we reported in the newsletter on a similar fire: “The largest fire was the Napanoch Point fire in Ulster County, which was started by a lightning strike and burned 142 acres of land. Forest Rangers led the incident response in cooperation with the Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Services, New York State Police, Ulster County, and other State and local partners. Eight days after the fire started, the [teams of firefighters had the fire under control.](#)” By restoring these fire towers and keeping them in a good state of repair, they could again be used for their original purpose in the future.

The FFLA will be providing each volunteer with the CFTP with a special thank you and a gift from George Profous who continues to support this program. George designed a unique patch as a small way to say thank you to each of the volunteers. As one visitor said “*This tower has a life of its own and makes ours richer just knowing it is standing watch, generation after generation.*” Thank you volunteers! Thank you George and Helen!

As we move from celebrating a quarter century of success in the CFTP to photos of this year's successful Lighting Event, which originated with Red Hill's Chair, Doug Hamilton we will focus on the 5 Catskill Towers with apologies that no photo was available from Red Hill this year.



Overlook by Matty Lonergan

Tom Rankin's photo of Balsam Lake



Hunter by John Varrecchia



Tremper by Mark Atchinson

### Around the State

**Stissing:** The Friends of Stissing Landmarks (FOSL) crew has been working hard on trail improvements up Stissing Mountain! Water bars, switchbacks and some steps have been put in place along with new trail markers! Thanks to all of you for your efforts, things are looking great! Photo by Tracy Rakin



**Buck:** On a very chilly Friday morning, 5 volunteers joined the wonderful folks from the Town of Long Lake to try to make a bit more progress at the soon to be re-opened Buck Mt. Fire Tower. We had to postpone our plans a couple of times due to rain and on this morning we were more concerned with the cool temperatures and how well the paint would stick than precipitation. And then it began to snow! We conferred with our friends Alex and Chad from the Town and decided the weather forecast was calling for some clearing skies so we would give it a try. We did manage to get a fair amount of work done as the wind was drying the precipitation off the tower quite quickly. The snow capped high peaks could be seen in the distance and there was gorgeous foliage in the foreground. It made those volunteers forget about the cold for a bit! Many, many thanks to Fred, Harry, Meg, and Tom for joining me. And many thanks to the Town of Long Lake for their efforts to reopen this tower. I am confident that will happen in 2023. For now the tower and trail remain CLOSED.

**Bramley Mt Fire Tower:** I had the pleasure of attending Marty Podskoch's presentation at the Cannon Free Library in Delhi earlier this month. A wonderful crowd turned out to hear about Catskill Fire Towers, and in particular, the Bramley Mt. Fire Tower project. Marty generously gave half the proceeds from his book sales to the Friends of Bramley Mt. Group and they are very appreciative of that! As always, it was a pleasure to see Marty and to share his enthusiasm for fire towers. The library did record the program. As soon as we see it available, we will share. I also had the pleasure of co-leading a hike of exchange students from Germany to Bramley. It was great to have this opportunity and we look forward to many more of these in the future when the tower is up.



**Berry Hill:** We are very grateful to the NYS DEC for their efforts in producing this new map for the Berry Hill Fire Tower. Retired Forester Andy Goeller was instrumental in getting the restoration project moving forward and Chris Sprague has stepped into his big shoes. There have been many aspects to the reopening of the Berry Hill Fire Tower and the support from the NYS DEC has made our work much easier. Having this new map to share with visitors will be wonderful! Thank you Chris and Andy! Photo by Cory Telarico.

**Poke O Moonshine:** 3 events are upcoming at Poke O Moonshine, please see the calendar for the details and consider attending. You will also want to read the Friends Group's latest newsletter and hear about how their Steward season went, including a field trip to the tower. Additionally, there was an odd rescue reported in the October 11<sup>th</sup> Ranger Report from Poke O. The report says the hikers were well prepared and able to shelter in place, but must have only been a few minutes up the trail and required a rescue?? Odd. From the report "On Oct. 9 at 1:10 p.m., Ranger Black responded to Poke-O-Moonshine Mountain for two subjects unable to continue on the trail due to rocky and wet terrain. Ranger Black spoke to the subjects on the phone and told the pair to stay where they were. Ranger Black reached the hikers from Big Flats at 2:42 p.m. The hikers were well-prepared for a day hike and able to shelter in place during a rainstorm. Ranger Black assisted the hikers back to the trailhead by 3:15 p.m."

**Belfry, Blue, Kane, Lyon, Owls Head, Pillsbury, Snowy, Spruce, Vandewhacker, and Wakely:** The State Chapter recently finalized an agreement with the NYS DEC Ray Brook office to maintain the ten towers and associated facilities in that region that did not have a Friends Group. This agreement encompasses 7 towers we have already been working on, but adds Vandewhacker, Spruce, and Belfry. We know some of our readers are already volunteers who have expressed an interest in assisting with the work at these towers. Please let me know of your continued interest. As we meet with the various DEC managers and foresters in the coming months and make plans for work in 2023 and beyond, it will be very helpful to know who is on board with us. Thank you!

**Leonard Hill:** In September of 2018, a volunteer and I met with NYS DEC staff at the Leonard Hill Fire Tower to discuss possible restoration efforts. We have been waiting since then for an engineering report. While we cannot say that report has been completed yet, we can say that we are getting excited for the possibilities. Stay tuned!

**Makomis/Speculator:** A wonderful article that clearly details this project and some great photographs from Speculator Mayor Barrett can be found here: <https://www.adirondackexperience.com/story/2022/reaching-new-heights-in-speculator> The tower is open to the public from sunrise to sunset with a gated timer on the fire tower fence set for 7 AM to 7:30 PM at this time.

**What was this here for?:** A common question that we hear when stewarding at fire towers. I found this article to be very interesting, and the newspaper headline that is included in the article clearly explains why we needed a fire prevention system/early warning system in place in New York State. <https://www.adirondackalmanack.com/2022/09/fire-in-the-adirondacks.html>

**Fire Tower Business for Sale:** Love fire towers and thinking of a new career? Many towers in NYS and across America have the stamp of Davana LLC on them. This could be a perfect opportunity for you! <https://www.bizbuysell.com/Business-Opportunity/Construction-Company-specializing-in-Fire-Tower-Sales-and-Installation/1896805>

### **Lighting Event 2022, Continued**

Each year we are so pleased to hear first hand feedback from our Illuminators and from those individuals who have been touched by this event. There is so much involved that we have to spread it out over the course of several newsletters. We do have a correction to a photo in last month's newsletter. Both Fred and Harry told me they believe the photo, "The view from Cathedral Rock of Mt. Arab and Owls Head" is likely to be Mt. Arab and Mt. Morris.

**Mt Morris:** Some have mentioned the fact that Mt. Morris fire tower is on private property and why was this included in the Lighting Event. Yes, it is on private property, but there is an amateur radio group that has permission to be there and they very kindly participated in the event this year. We are grateful to them as the Mt. Morris fire tower is certainly a historic structure, being the only 22 foot Aeromotor tower still standing in its original location.

**Randall Tower:** We have other private towers that participate in the event such as the Randall Tower out in Cuyler. We are very pleased to have Doug and his enthusiasm for this event participate every year. He is always willing to have someone stop by if you call ahead.

**Page Pond:** Girl Scout Camp Amahami continues to take good care of the historic Page Pond fire tower and utilize the tower for many of their activities year round. They were happy to participate in the Lighting Event this year, another private tower.

**Woodhull:** Retired Forest Ranger Gary Lee shares his Illuminator experience. “My grandson Jake and I went up to the Woodhull Fire Tower to light up the tower. I was glad to have the company and the sunset was beautiful. As the night sky crept in, we could see that looking east was going to be a problem as haze moved in with the darkness. Looking west we could see the Oneida County Airport in Rome, windmills around Lowville, and to the south, we could see part of Woodhull Lake and the wind mills to the south down toward Herkimer.

As it got closer to lighting up the tower, we could see headlamps moving up the trail to the Bald Mountain Tower and then again just like last year there was fireworks display along the north shore of First Lake under the tower. Then their lights came on as did Stillwater Tower, but to the east we couldn't see Blue, Wakely or Snowy Mountain Towers like we did the last couple years as they hid in the haze. The only thing we saw in the trail was a small American Toad that jumped out of our way coming back down. My grandson got some photos on his cell phone of the tower lit up as I could never do that being the only one up there.”

**Swede:** Illuminator Barbara Blum was assisted by three generations of Retired Forest Ranger Bill Houck's family, with his wife, daughter, and granddaughter all taking part in the event, including providing us with the fabulous photo here. What a memorable evening!



Randall Tower by Doug Randall



Spruce by Karl Pritchard



**Swede by Melanie Houck – Mt. Morris by Darwin Benware – Woodhull by Gary Lee**

### Calendar

**Swede:** Closed at this time - reopens December 16<sup>th</sup>.

**Spruce:** Will close on October 22<sup>nd</sup> and remain closed through December 4<sup>th</sup>.

**Stillwater:** Closed at this time – reopens December 21<sup>st</sup>.

**Dickinson Hill:** October 20<sup>th</sup>. Join an educator for a hike up to the Fire Tower to see the beautiful colors of the Rensselaer Plateau! Learn about those who used to watch over the plateau from their high vantage point, the restoration of the tower, and also why leaves change color. Bring a lunch to enjoy at the fire tower. The full hike is three miles over uneven terrain with some elevation change. Ages 7 and up. No charge. Pre-registration by phone is required! Pre-register now as space is limited! Call 518-279-1155 to register.

**Cornell Hill:** October 22<sup>nd</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup>, the tower will be open from 10am to 3pm. Then it will remain closed until April of 2023.

**Poke O Moonshine Events:** October 22<sup>nd</sup> is a volunteer work day. November 5<sup>th</sup> is the annual fall clean up, and looking ahead to next year, January 29 of 2023, will be the annual snowshoe/mammal tracking hike. For more information on these events check out [www.pokeomoonshine.org](http://www.pokeomoonshine.org)

Please think about FFLA when you are doing your holiday shopping. We have some great hats, t-shirts and patches along with a number of books for your favorite fire tower geek. We also know that many of the individual Friends groups have similar items. Please consider purchasing gifts from those who support the fire towers you love. <http://ffla.org/lookout-store.html>

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