

Forest Fire Lookout Association

New York Chapter

April 2017

You just have to love April in New York. I've visited towers on snowshoes and in 90 degree weather this month! The Observers who manned these towers in the past often had some real bragging points when they made it to their post for an April 1st opening. A lot of time it was on snowshoes. Sometimes by jeep, but with a lot of shoveling involved. And of course there have been many Aprils when fire season was wild and severe with lots of dry material just waiting for a cigarette to drop or a brush pile to get out of hand, then that nice spring breeze and things got interesting!

The other thing that often happened in late April was the Observer's lending a hand with stocking trout if the ice was out. I have heard stories of the milk cans in the back of the Willys filled with trout, driven as close as possible, then carried on foot the rest of the way. Empty those cans weighed a considerable amount. Once filled with water and fish, it must have been quite a challenge to walk it down a rugged New York trail to release the fish.

Our friends in Florida have been experiencing an April fire season. Bob Spear reported that the 100 foot tall Indian Lakes fire tower was consumed by fire in a 5,000 acre burn and near Naples there was another 7,000 acre fire. As I type this, there are over 100 fires burning in the state. Thoughts and prayers to all those fighting the fires to remain safe.

Another thing that happens in April is the pool noodles are on sale! Wondering what this has to do with fire towers? I have seen several different ways to protect the visiting public and volunteers from hitting their head on the steel on a fire tower when entering and exiting the cab and sometimes on the stairways too. The pool noodles are a nice thick foam so they offer good padding. They also come in bright, neon colors so that they are easily seen as a hazard to avoid. Be sure to secure them well.

In Memoriam: A special ceremony will be held in Saranac lake, at the graveside of Ranger James Ahern on April 30th at 1400hrs to mark the 100th anniversary of his passing, the first line of duty death of the Forest Ranger force. Hope you can attend, looking to get as many retirees as possible. We will be having a late lunch after the ceremony at the downhill grill. To read more about Ranger Ahern, please refer to this article by Ranger Scott Van Laer: <http://www.adirondackalmanack.com/2016/03/the-dangerous-jobs-of-adirondack-forest-rangers.html>

Graffiti seems to be rampant on many fire towers. It is destruction of property. It is a criminal offense and it is all too common at fire towers. How do you prevent it from happening? How do you discourage it? Painting over it often so it does not appear to be a "normal" or "acceptable" occurrence seems to be a deterrent. Should there be posting of the possible fines for this crime in the trail register or kiosk? Could game cameras be a deterrent? I would strongly suggest having a discussion with your DEC liaison if you are having a problem at your tower or see it happening at a tower. Hopefully, working together you can develop a plan that will put a stop to this form of destruction and possibly prosecute those who continue to mar the towers with graffiti.

Trivia Question from March: What year did it become mandatory to fly the flag from the fire tower to signify that the Observer was on duty? Correct answer was 1926, sent in by Bob Eckler and Warren Johnson! You two always seem to stick together – stickers are on their way!



Trivia Question for April: What was “The Goose”?

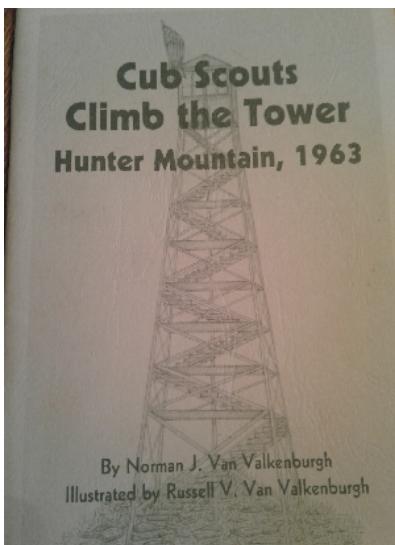
Volunteer Badges: For those of you who were in attendance at the Northeastern Conference last fall, you may have seen the volunteer badges that Keith Argow, our National Chair displayed. I have spoken with the makers of those badges and they do not generally have one for the FFLA, only the US Forest Service. However, they would be willing to do a special order with the FFLA logo on it if we can get a minimum order of 50. They would take 5 to 6 weeks to make up. The cost would be \$8.04 each.

HELP WANTED: See last month for help wanted at Bald, Sterling, Pillsbury and Azure.

Stillwater: We need volunteers to be Summit Stewards (SS) on holiday weekends and weekends thru the summer. We’re asking people to be up at the tower from 10:00 to 2:00. We’ll have a Summit Steward Manual to refer to that tells about the tower, history, and what you can see. (You will not be tested. This is a low key project). Photos too. We’ll have a lock box to keep the manual for the next SS. We need coverage for 26 days, so let me know what Saturday or Sunday or holiday weekends you can volunteer.

Hurricane: The folks at Hurricane have some big projects on tap this year. Painting the cab and tower supports, doing the windows frames, carrying up a new map table and installing it, and getting volunteer stewards in the tower.

Jackie Jones: This tower is currently closed to the public due to its condition. A project to restore and repair the tower has been approved. A date has not yet been set for the work, but if you are interested in helping out, please let me know. We would be very grateful for your help and work with everyone interested to get a date set as soon as possible.



Book of the Month: This great little book will fit right in with our centennial celebration. *Cub Scouts Climb the Tower: Hunter Mountain 1963* by Norm VanValkenburgh. Norm is a native of the Catskills and spent his career with the NYSDEC, retiring as the Director of Lands and Forests. Norm is the author of several books, but this is the only young reader's book he has written.

Welcome to Miranda Bell, this years Poke O Moonshine Steward!

VOLUNTEERS – You guys just never, ever get enough applause. When you are a visitor you see an old derelict tower or you see a tower in great shape. But Volunteers - Volunteer activity behind the scenes adds up to hundreds and thousands of hours that are never seen by the visitors. The hours spent organizing, planning, working with other entities, measuring, fund raising, purchasing, carrying, the countless trips up and down the mountainside, researching, painting, restoring, hauling out of old materials, educating, recruiting others, scheduling volunteers, planning on going maintenance never ends and never gets enough applause. With heartfelt gratitude – a big **THANK YOU!!!**

Speaking of Centennial Towers – The patch is back! I have had several people ask me about the NYS Centennial Fire Tower patch. I ordered a new supply. Currently these patches are the only fund raiser the state chapter is doing. Plans are to use the proceeds to put together “safety kits” that will contain some of the necessary safety equipment for working on fire towers such as hard hats, safety glasses, work gloves, etc. These kits could be lent out to groups as needed. You can obtain the patch on the FFLA website (you can purchase them there with pay pal or a credit card) or by contacting me (check or money order only). <http://www.firelookout.org/lookout-store---patches.html>

Our Centennial Tower for April is Hunter Mountain Fire Tower. It is the tower currently located at the highest elevation in the state – 4040 feet. The first tower on Hunter was a wooden, three legged affair that was erected in 1909. It was replaced in August of 1917 with a 60 foot steel tower. It was not placed on the summit. In 1953, the tower was relocated to the current location which is the true summit of the mountain. When one hikes along the trail you can still see the remains of the old tower footings and the cabin. There was often trouble at the tower cabin with the porcupines. A garage was built to house the jeep and to protect it from the porcupines. Stories abound of several porcupines being shot. 24 men and women served as Observers at Hunter Mountain. The tower was closed in 1989. In 1997 it became part of the Catskill Fire Tower Project, a group of 5 fire tower committees, the NYSDEC and the Catskill Center for Conservation and Development that worked to refurbish the towers. Gordon Hoekstra is the current Volunteer Coordinator there. Gordon has several plans underway to celebrate the centennial including lighting the tower on several dates in August. A new plaque will be installed that is dedicated to the centennial and the Observers who served at the tower. As soon as the dates are firmed up, I will pass them along.





Don't forget you can join on line on our web page. Membership benefits include a beautiful quarterly magazine packed full of information from New York and other locations, opportunities to attend conferences with like minded people and more. And all for just \$15.00! Thanks so much for taking the time to read this month's newsletters. Contributions for future newsletters are always welcome!

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