

Mosley Hill Fire Lookout Saved

Catahoula Ranger District, Kisatchie National Forest, Louisiana

Oddly, thanks to road construction by the State of Louisiana, the Mosley Hill Lookout is beginning a new life. Instead of sitting alone in a remote location, where vandals, weather, and time have turned a once grand U.S. Forest Service Fire Lookout into a dismal shell of her former glory, she is now being moved to a new home within visual range of the Catahoula Ranger District office, where she will be restored, re-erected, and stand as the focal point of a new educational interpretive center.



Prior to its de-erection, Mosley Hill Lookout sat on a hill located on the west side of US Hwy 167, 1.5 miles north of LA Hwy 472 in Grant Parish. Mosley Hill was part of a network of eight State and USFS lookouts observing for fire on the Catahoula Unit. Today only the Mosley Hill Lookout remains. The other lookouts in the network were Verda, Sardis, Antonia, and Colgrade (state lookouts), Colfax (coop between state and FS), and Iatt and Catahoula (USFS lookouts). All lookouts were taken out of service by 1983 in favor of State Forestry over-flights. These over-flights occur whenever there is a fire danger; and during these times, flights are conducted two times a day utilizing two aircraft, one for areas north and one for areas south of the Red River.

Mosley Hill was the last USFS lookout constructed on the Catahoula District. Constructed in 1949 with an order number of 291, the tower and cab are of all metal construction. The tower itself is constructed of 256 steel angle beams of various lengths by Carnegie Steel and its subsidiary Jones & Laughlin Steel. Each piece of the lookout is consecutively numbered (i.e., 510T 291, 511T 291, 512T 291, etc.), with its eight sections rising to 100 feet above the foundation pilings which are set 30 feet apart. The cab is accessed by 133 steps and seven landings that climb up the center of the tower, only exiting the last section before entering through a steel catwalk that surrounds the 13' X 13' metal cab.

In August of 2002 an Environmental Briefing Information document was produced and distributed by Louisiana Timed Managers (LTM), the company managing the Louisiana highway widening project for a number of Louisiana highways, presenting the proposed right-of-way (ROW) for US Hwy 167. In this briefing document, the Catahoula District



Archaeologist noted that the plans called for the addition of two southbound lanes and would pass directly over the location of Mosley Hill Lookout. This information eventually prompted a telephone call to Peter Nyberg of LTM, who has the responsibility of arranging the clearing of structures within the ROW.

Prior to this phone call, it was important to start the process of evaluation for National Register eligibility. It was at this time that the District Archaeologist put together the nomination form that would get the Lookout on the National Historic Lookout Register. Mosley Hill Fire Lookout was posted to the register in 2003 as US# 513, LA# 4. It was now time to call Mr. Nyberg.

At the time of the call, Nyberg was not aware that there was an historic fire lookout on the ROW, even though a Section 106 survey had been performed (the tower was noted in the survey report, but was not considered for National Register eligibility). Mr. Nyberg was promptly made aware of the tower and its significance, and he immediately started working on removing it from the ROW to a new location designated by the Catahoula District Ranger in consultation with the District Archaeologist. LTM put out a request for bids to move the lookout, and received three. The winning bidder was Kevin Thorne's Hickory Builders LLC of Pineville, with a bid of \$123,600.

On Wednesday, February 1, 2006, Hickory Builders amid a media frenzy, brought the cab down off its 100 foot perch in a first step towards restoring this historic fire lookout to its former glory. Over the next two days the tower was de-erected and taken to a location adjacent to the re-erection site.



The next step in the process is the boring and pouring of the foundation pilings or pedestals, which will require thirty days to cure. The tower will then be re-erected, but the cab will not be re-installed until it can be restored, after which Kevin Thorne and his company will return and raise the cab into place.

There is a lot of work to be accomplished prior to the cab's re-installation. The Catahoula District is looking for volunteers to help restore the cab, with experience in carpentry and cabinetry, sheet metal work, sand blasting and painting, as well as window glass installation. The work will be completed using the "Passport In Time" program. Interested volunteers should contact Catahoula District Archaeologist, Mark Gutzman, at (318) 765-3554.

After the Mosley Hill Fire Lookout has been restored, it will become the main focus of a new interpretive center co-located with the Catahoula Butterfly Garden, approximately 100 yards from the lookout. Visitors will be able to ascend the tower to get a bird's eye view of the Catahoula



L - R: Carl Brevelle, Kevin Thorne, Mark Gutzman, Peter Nyberg

District, but will also be presented with information on the daily operation of these historic structures. Obviously, Mosley Hill Fire Lookout will not be accessible to those visitors with disabilities, so a 7' x 7' cab will be included in the interpretive center so that these visitors will have a similar experience without the ascent. It is planned to have a remote camera monitor in this cab that will present a live image from within the Mosley Hill cab.

The interpretive center will present information on fire prevention and suppression, as well as information on other resource areas such as Timber, Wildlife, Botany, and Archaeology.

Mark Gutzman, Archaeologist, Kisatchie NF, Catahoula District