

# FFLA Newsletter – New York Chapter

## May 2016

**Wild fires in New York:** This past month, there was a fire in the Shawangunks, at Sam's Point. This one burned 2,068 acres, making it the third largest in recent history. The fire bordered on the trail that went to High Point Fire Tower! Here is a link to the Sam's Point Fire:

<http://www.recordonline.com/news/20160427/wildfire-at-sams-point-60-under-control-mop-up-continues>. This is a link to some additional photos of the fire you may also enjoy:  
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/nysdec/sets/72157665312645384>.

The Roosa Gap fire occurred at this time last year. The *Conservationist* magazine has a great article about the fire, including a photo of the crew working from the Roosa Gap Fire Tower! The fire burned approximately 2,700 acres. <http://www.dec.ny.gov/pubs/105670.html>. Interestingly, there was another smaller wild fire in the Catskills last year at this time on Hunter Mountain, the location of yet another fire tower. I can't help but ask if the fire towers were operational, would these fires have been so devastating? Or would the Observers have spotted the smoke and gotten resources there a bit more quickly?

**Trivia Question Answers from April:** When I asked why telephone poles were so different and what attracted the bears to them, I got a number of responses. 4 FFLA stickers were sent out! Sonny Baldwin, Bill Tindall, Warren Johnson, and Bob Spear all let me know that the reason for the bears chewing had to do with the vibrations on the line. Both Warren and Sonny surmised that the bears thought there may be honey bees contained therein!

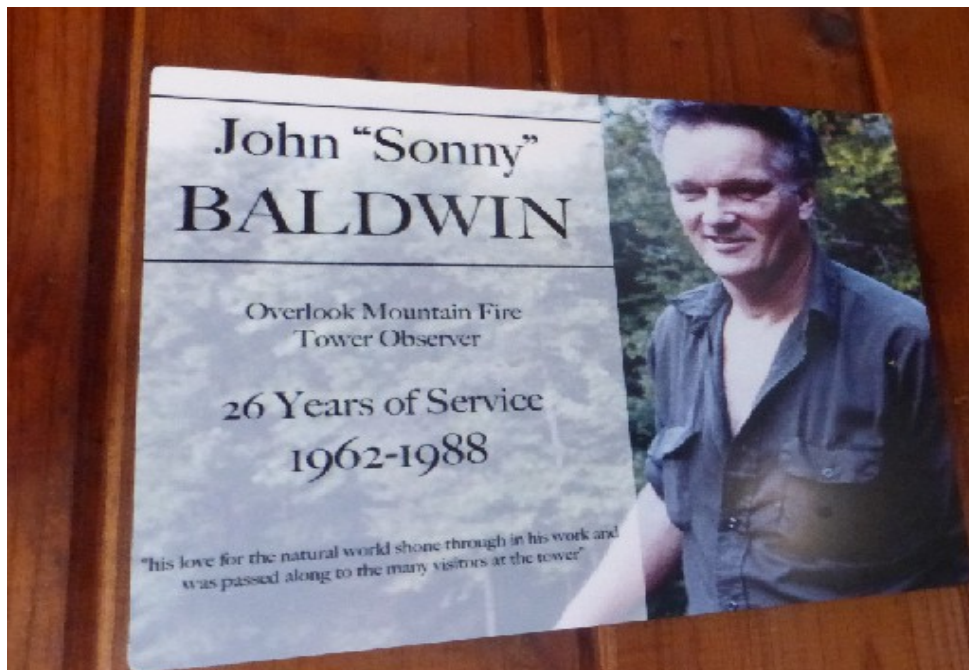
*Why were some poles metal?* Bill Tindall tells me “the metal poles were that way for mounting on rock. A small shallow hole would be drilled into the rock with a star drill and hammer. The pole was then cemented in place.”

*Why did the poles have sloped tops?* To prevent rot was the general answer. Sonny Baldwin tells me that those nicely sharpened poles on Mount Tremper were actually done by running a chainsaw around the top. As they weathered, the wood chips left behind came off leaving them with those nicely sharpened tops.

*Why did the poles have different brackets on them?* Bob Spear shares, “At Sterling Fire Tower, the steel poles with the twin tops for 2 wires you have a photo of were also drilled into rock from the road up to the tower. I believe these were put there starting shortly after the Tower was built because the original telephone wire used was two strands of steel wire capable of carrying a 'signal' up to 22 miles. Some of the ones at Sterling still stand and I had painted them yellow so they could be seen. Several more had been run over and destroyed by logging operations. The 2 wire system was prone to lightning strikes and in the 40's was replaced by a single cable with two wire leads, these were attached to trees by 'split-insulators.’”

**Trivia Question for May:** As a follow up on communication, can anyone share any other means of communication prior to the use of phones? I know radio use came later and we will deal with that at another time. I can think of a couple of other ways that the spotting of a fire was communicated prior to phone lines. Does anyone have any thoughts on how this was done or any stories to share? Remember those precious FFLA stickers are at stake!

I had the honor of speaking with Retired Fire Tower Observer John “Sonny” Baldwin recently. Sonny proudly served as the Observer at Overlook Fire Tower from 1962 to 1988. He came by the job naturally as his Dad, Harry was the Observer at nearby Tremper Mountain Fire Tower. Sonny was an observer of the outdoors in many ways, not just as a Fire Tower Observer, but also as an observer of nature. He shared the special moment when he saw 5 rainbows from the summit, a heavenly site he will always remember even though he had no camera with him to take a photo at the time. He observed that the timber rattlesnakes that resided near the fire tower did not make their appearance in the spring until the oak leaves were the size of kitten ears. He had an uncanny ability to handle them as well. Sonny always exhibited a great sense of humor (and still does) and would often surprise visitors by climbing the outside of the fire tower structure rather than climbing the stairs! He recalled how porcupines would always chew on the trail markers, but by attaching them with a single nail in a loose fashion, they would just twirl around and around rather than chew them up! It was wonderful to have the opportunity to chat with you Sonny! I look forward to our next conversation and thank you for your dedication and service to the Overlook Mountain Fire Tower!



**I Love My Park:** <http://www.ptny.org/events/i-love-my-park-day> This is a relatively new event organized in part by [New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation](#) (OPRHP) and local Friends groups, to celebrate and enhance New York’s parks and historic sites and bring visibility to the entire park system and its needs. Work projects are scheduled throughout the State. Should your Friends group be part of this event next year? Let me know what you think.

**Sterling forest hike:** On April 17th, I had the pleasure of a walk to the Sterling Forest Fire Tower. This was a follow up to the Slide Show presentation that I had done earlier in the month. The hike was led by the Friends of Sterling Forest group leader, Susan Serico. (Susan is a real friend of fire towers, and is the co chair of the Mount Tremper group as well – thank you for all you do Susan!). There was lovely weather and 18 people joined us. It gave us an opportunity to showcase the history of Sterling Forest Fire Tower and to educate the public on its history, renovation project and to distribute some Smokey Bear paraphernalia. Wes Griffin has agreed to take the lead on the renovations there. If you have an interest in helping out, please let me know and I'll put you in touch with Wes. We are currently

on hold with renovations pending the appointment of a new park manager. We are optimistic that the new manager will be announced shortly and will allow the work at the tower to pick back up as soon as possible.

**Maps:** If any of you have a need for an alidade map, please let me know. I have a person who may be interested in producing one for you and has the expertise to do a great job.

**The Smokey Generation: Warning** – you will get lost in this website, get nothing done for hours, but the memories are wonderful! My favorite that I have listened to thus far can be found by clicking on Stories by Topic, then hover over the photos and when you come to Cowboy Coffee, you should listen! I am sure you may find other favorites. Enjoy! I would love to capture memories of our own New York fire tower history with such a project. If anyone knows of a college that may be interested in partnering with us for such a project, please let me know. Enjoy the stories of this special generation! The Smokey generation web page is at: <http://thesmokeygeneration.com/view-stories-by-topic/>.

## Work Projects Going on All Around the State

**Mount Adams Fire Tower:** Don't forget that there is a work date planned for May 21<sup>st</sup>. Contact Jack Coleman at The Adirondack High Peaks Foundation. Jack Coleman, aka ADKJack has taken the lead in this project. Below is the plan for spring trail work and replacement of the panoramic map in the cab. Would you like to lend a hand? Contact Jack through <http://www.adkhighpeaks.com/forums/index.php> He writes: “*May 21 2016 Fire tower and trail work. Time to do the spring maintenance run. Trail work on the way up and normal painting and fence work on the tower. Will be replacing the panoramic map in the cab. Please let me know in advance if you would like to join in the fun. Anticipate meeting at the trailhead at 09:00 am*”.

**The Friends of Hurricane Mountain:** This is a group dedicated to helping others appreciate and preserve Hurricane Mountain and its fire tower. They are seeking volunteers who may be interested in becoming Summit Stewards this summer. The Student Conservation Corps made great strides in October 2015, and work will continue by ADK and volunteers in cooperation with the DEC this summer. Anyone who can spare part of a weekend day during the months of July, August, or September is asked to contact the Friends group. The role and responsibilities of Volunteer Summit Stewards are to greet hikers, and provide educational information about the landmark geography, history, and restoration of the fire tower. If you enjoy the outdoors and meeting people and if you can volunteer a day or two on a weekend this summer, please contact Friends of Hurricane Mountain volunteer, Kathleen Blaisel at [518-946-2622](tel:518-946-2622) or email [kblaisel1987@gmail.com](mailto:kblaisel1987@gmail.com). All necessary training will be provided. The Friends group will also be organizing trail work days for anyone interested in trail maintenance, or helping out with the fire tower rehabilitation, such as with light construction and painting. Stay in touch by following the project on [www.facebook.com/HurricaneMountainFireTower](http://www.facebook.com/HurricaneMountainFireTower) or [www.hurricanemountainfiretower.org](http://www.hurricanemountainfiretower.org).

**St. Regis:** Don't forget you have until June 15<sup>th</sup> to take part in designing a logo patch for the Friends of St. Regis group! Check out their website for details, including updates on the installation of a new roof: <http://www.friendsofstregis.org/fire-tower-restoration/>.

**Stillwater work dates:** May 7, 14, and 28 and June 11 work dates are planned. For May 7<sup>th</sup>, meet at 9:00 am. Jim promises there is always a breeze on the fire tower, effectively keeping the black flies away!

**Mount Tremper:** Volunteers are needed for the upcoming season. Would you like to spend your day sitting in this fire tower, greeting and educating visitors? Mt. Tremper is one of the 5 towers that make up the Catskill Fire Tower Project. The project's goal is to have a volunteer at each of the 5 towers every weekend between Memorial Day and Columbus Day. The main trailhead for Mount Tremper is located close to the village of Phoenicia, one of the most popular villages in the Catskills. Hiker volume has increased markedly in the last few years. The opportunity to provide information to a large number of hikers regarding fire towers, their history, the appropriate use of the surrounding lands, and even lend a hand with some maintenance, is a great way to spend a weekend. Please contact Susan if you are interested or know someone who is: [tremperfiretower01@gmail.com](mailto:tremperfiretower01@gmail.com).

**Azure Mountain trail work date:** The Friends of Azure Mountain are looking for some help for trail maintenance. Meet at the trail head parking at 9:00 am on May 14<sup>th</sup> to lend a hand.

<http://azuremountain.org/>

**Friends of Poke-O-Moonshine:** The Sum(m)it up for Poke-O trail project expands, work goes on and the fund grows! In their spring/summer newsletter, the group reports that their campaign is going better than they ever imagined! Last year over 40 rock steps and 7 large rock water bars were installed on the Ranger trail. They have set a goal of raising the remaining \$168,000 by 2017, the centennial of the fire tower. If you can help them out with a donation, please do so! They are planning on hikes and celebrations the weekend of July 28-30<sup>th</sup>, 2017 to celebrate! Friends of Poke O Moonshine also introduced this summer's Steward, Kyle Pendell. Be sure to stop up and say hi to Kyle! Spring and Summer Activities include Saturday, July 9<sup>th</sup> Trail Work on the Ranger Trail – meet at the campground at 9. Call David Thomas-Train at 518-576-4592 or Tom Hayhurst at 518-562-9989 for details.

**The FFLA Western Conference** will be held next month in Oregon. Are you planning a summer trip? This could be a nice destination. For more information about the conference and to register, check out our web page: <http://www.firelookout.org/index.html>.

**NYS facebook page and our Eastern Conference:** The plan is to have it ready to go sometime around the first of June. In the meantime, my I/T guy/ aka my husband Tom/ did put together a google map to help you find your way around for our Northeastern Conference to be held September 17<sup>th</sup> & 18<sup>th</sup> in Keene, NY. We have included some possible suggestions for restaurants and lodging along with the fire house itself, the fire towers that can be visited, and area museums. Please check it out. Thanks much Tom! <https://www.google.com/maps/d/edit?mid=zx5pNuSqDyTM.k2KodRfZ73UQ>

I will be asking that it be added to FFLA's home page. Meanwhile, you can click on the current google map on the home page and it will take you to all our details! <http://www.firelookout.org/index.html>. I hope you can join us! You can become a member on the web page or renew your membership as well! Thanks in advance for doing so!

It appears that next month's newsletter will be filled with updates on a number of projects. May the skies be clear for all of the great work that you have planned for this month. May you have a group of volunteers with a great sense of humor, work safely and may the black flies remain elsewhere!

With much gratitude for all that you have done and are doing,

Laurie Rankin  
Director NYS FFLA