

FFLA Newsletter - New York Chapter

April 2016

While some grumbled loudly about our early April snows (in many cases of greater depth than we had all winter long), I rejoiced! The ground was very dry, covered with winter debris, there were no leaves to keep the sun from beating down and drying the ground out further, and those spring winds were adding to the equation. The end result was a perfect recipe for a difficult spring fire season. While we are not out of the woods yet, that snow changed the equation, at least temporarily.

Are we experiencing longer fire seasons in the United States? Here is an article from the NY Times: http://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/13/science/wildfires-season-global-warming.html?_r=0

Here's the projections for this year: <http://edmdigest.com/news/nifc-releases-seasonal-wildfire-outlook/>

Here's an interesting article about the pulaski – that all important wild land fire fighting tool: <http://adventure-journal.com/2015/03/an-ode-to-the-pulaski-the-heros-tool/>

Trivia Question Answer from March: What fire tower went out of service in 1916? It looks a lot different there today – it was the tower on Slide Mountain, the highest peak in the Catskills. Those two photos were taken in the 50's. The summit looks much different today with the view nearly obscured with tall trees. The reason for the fire tower's removal was poor visibility. The summit was so often in the clouds that it was not a reliable location for spotting fires. In 1934 a second steel fire tower was erected, but not for purposes of spotting fires and not by fire control. Little is known about this tower except for its subsequent removal.

Trivia Question for April: Why were telephone poles so different? And part two – why are bears attracted to them? Here are some photos of a telephone pole above treeline circa 1923 from Lyon Mountain, a telephone pole with a unique “pencil sharpened” top from Mount Tremper taken this winter, and an old telephone pole from Rock Rift (2 pictures).



The metal poles were often seen above treeline. Were they put there because of lightning strikes? I have not seen them below tree line. The bears certainly did not mark the metal poles. But they have chewed the wooden poles nearly in half at times! What is the attraction to a bear? Is it the chemicals they were treated with, often creosote? Was it the vibration of the lines? Was it that they were often cleared and

gave a bear good visibility? My son tells me that the local electric cooperative has had so many difficulties with bears ruining their poles in the vicinity of the Rock Rift fire tower that they are conducting an experiment. They have replaced 8 poles in the area, and left approximately 8 feet of the old poles standing close by. They are wondering (and hoping) if the bears will continue to utilize the old poles. I am assuming the telephone poles seen on Tremper were shaped this way to help repel water and thereby reduce rotting, but I have not seen that style anywhere else. Have you? Any thoughts? An FFLA sticker to anyone who has an answer!

Rock Rift Fire Tower: is located in Delaware County near the Cannonsville reservoir, which supplies water to New York City. The DEP (Department of Environmental Protection) has purchased the land around the tower so there is now a right of way to reach the tower. Last year, the Finger Lakes Trail Conference cleared and opened the trail to the fire tower. However, the State of NY still owns the fire tower and has not allowed access to it. The bottom 2 sets of stairs have been removed. The NYSDEC has agreed to sell the fire tower to the local Town of Tompkins, which is anxious to restore the fire tower and once again allow visitors. We sincerely hope the transaction occurs soon! In anticipation of that, we took a walk up the newly opened trail last month. It follows the Observer's jeep road for much of the way. Many of the old telephone poles are still standing along the route. The cabin at the summit is long gone, but the foundation remains along with a lilac bush and numerous daffodils were just starting to peak their heads above the soil. I could easily feel the presence of past Observer Linda Trask. I look forward to the land sale's conclusion and hearing the engineers report on the fire tower.

FFLA Restoration Grant Award: Now known as the Thompson Park Fire Tower, the old New Boston fire tower is currently getting a much needed face lift! It was awarded a \$500.00 FFLA restoration grant to conduct repairs. This tower was placed inside the park where it has great access for the general public who may not otherwise ever get a chance to see a fire tower. It is particularly accessible to those with young families and includes educational opportunities. The park has over 50,000 visitors per year! You can see there is also a kiosk with fire tower information there as well. Note in the attached photograph that they have had a little weather to contend with while trying to complete their project!

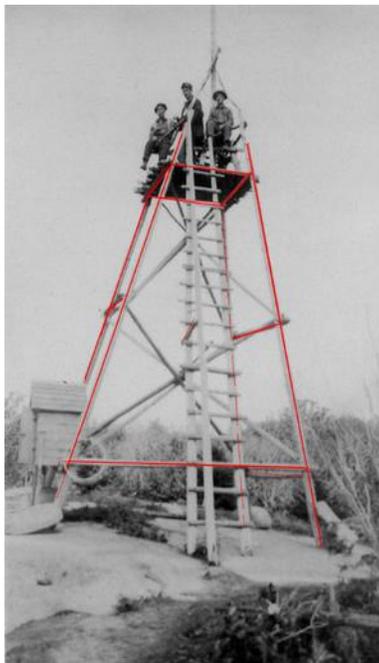


Mount Adams Fire Tower: The Adirondack High Peaks Foundation took on the renovations at this tower and the continued maintenance. Jack Coleman, aka 'ADK Jack' has taken the lead in this project. Below is the plan for spring work. Would you like to lend a hand? Contact Jack through <http://www.adkhighpeaks.com/forums/index.php>? 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.”

Stillwater Fire Tower: Jim Fox is looking for people to lend a hand. Additional dates have been added since last month. Incentives still apply! Jim writes “*Stillwater needs some love – can you help? Weather worn wood, rusted bolts, and fencing needs to be replaced! Steel and tin needs painting. Hike up and help - Saturdays - May 7, 14, and just added: May 28th on Memorial Day weekend. Email fsft@frontier.com*”

I came across a photograph that was labeled Stillwater that I shared with Jim. He was not certain that it was accurately labeled.. The mystery was resolved by Retired NYS Forest Ranger Paul Hartmann who looked closely at the photo and did some comparisons. He returned the attached photo to me with the red marking overlay clearly showing a wooden tower built over a wooden tower! He identified the tower as the Rondaxe tower on Bald Mountain. We can only speculate why the tower was built over the other tower. Paul's thoughts include that it was a tower within a tower or the first tower was over-built, with an additional structure, to perhaps increase the height or maybe the stability. I contacted Peg Masters of the Friends of Bald Mountain group and they were happy to see Paul's photo. She writes “*I have never seen the photo of the tower over the tower. The first wooden tower was erected in the 1870s, I believe by Verplanck Colvin while doing his State surveys. Your two photos occurred most likely between 1912 and 1917.”*



CIC Fire Tower: With the passing of the 2016-2017 budget, there will be \$994,000 in funding for the Catskill Interpretive Center in Mount Tremper. The money will likely fund a model fire tower, a pavilion, a ranger cabin museum, electric upgrades and electric vehicle charging stations at the site. I do hope a substantial amount of this will be utilized for the fire tower. I know that Dave Vana has visited the site and I hope his work with the DEC and the CIC will continue. I also hope that the museum will be an Observer's cabin. While Forest Rangers certainly played an important role in fire towers and fire fighting, I am unaware of any of them ever having a cabin in the Catskills. There certainly were and are some outposts in the Adirondacks that house Rangers and Assistant Rangers, but

none in the Catskills. If you know of one, please do let me know.

Catskill Fire Tower Project: All 5 of the fire towers are gearing up for the upcoming season. Volunteer orientations and opening weekends are planned. Expect to stop by any weekend from Memorial Day through Columbus Day and find a volunteer there to greet you and give you the grand tour of the Catskills!

St. Regis Fire Tower: Check out their web page for updates and for more information on how to enter into their 'design a logo' project: <http://www.friendsofstregis.org/>. Click on the link directly under their current photograph on their web page for all of the information. And while you are there, let them know that you would like to help with their restoration efforts!

Hurricane Fire Tower: Check out their web page where work for the spring is getting organized: <http://www.hurricanefiretower.org/>. The coordinator writes *"We're getting ready for work on Hurricane this spring and summer -- painting, trail work, interpretive signs, and more. We can use some help!"*

Sterling Forest Fire Tower: I was fortunate to have an opportunity to present a slide show on the history of fire towers at Sterling Forest State Park to about 25 people earlier this month. Organized through the Friends of Sterling Forest, it was part of their monthly programming. They also offer numerous hikes. In this case, we will be doing a follow up hike to the fire tower on 4-17. The park manager has retired and we are anxiously awaiting an opportunity to work with the new manager at Sterling Forest to complete renovations there. Part of the reason for the slide show was to encourage local involvement in the restoration project.

I put the slide show together in such a manner that it can be shared with other volunteer groups or at community meetings around the state. One can simply take out the local fire tower information and insert their local tower. I think the program generally went over quite well. There are a few things that I will change, such as shortening it a bit to keep it to one hour. If you are interested in having me do a slide show in your area or if you would like to utilize this, please just let me know.

We didn't get the facebook page up and running this month. We are hoping 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 17th & 18th in Keene. 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. We will not benefit in any way if you utilize any of the businesses noted. They are simply possible local suggestions. Please check it out. Thanks much to Tom for putting this together! <https://www.google.com/maps/d/edit?mid=zx5pNuSqDyTM.k2KodRfZ73UQ> I will be asking that it be added to the 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 conference 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!

In closing, as I read this I am amazed at the amount of time and effort all of you are putting into the preservation, restoration, and educational efforts regarding our beloved fire towers. Thank you hardly seems to cover it!

With much gratitude,

Laurie Rankin, Director NYS FFLA