



**Forest Fire Lookout Association
New York State Chapter
March 2024**

AND THE WINNER IS.....This wonderful photograph of Lyon Mountain taken at sunrise on 3-6-23 by Bruce Hadley! Congratulations Bruce! Many thanks to all who submitted photos and to all who voted. Bruce won the most votes and this photograph is the cover photo through April 10th on our Facebook page.



AROUND THE COUNTRY

Wildfires have been raging across the State of Texas and into Oklahoma since our last newsletter. To date, the Smokehouse Creek Fire has burned more than 1,058,000 acres! There are some very scary numbers associated with conditions in those areas. Very low humidity, less than 10% is one of the most striking factors! Wow, it would not take much ignition to get things going and then more windy conditions are predicted. Stay safe out there! <https://www.foxweather.com/extreme-weather/extreme-fire-weather-southern-plains-texas>

From Dave Quam, Minnesota State Chapter Director, I received this excellent you tube video. The challenges were many, but in the end success! Enjoy and thanks for sending Dave: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3N6D3fTRGuk>

During Women's History Month, I thought it may be of interest to readers to see if women worked at towers in other states. They did: <https://redfeatherhistoricalsociety.org/local-histories/personal-histories/joie-poulsen-history/>

AROUND THE STATE

The Department of Environmental Conservation Commissioner is stepping down. We will be watching closely to see who is appointed. We sincerely hope that they will work toward providing the necessary resources for the Department to function well and that he/she will be a friend of the fire towers.

https://www.adirondackexplorer.org/explorer_reports/dec-commissioner-seggos-announces-departure

We have had a very odd and warm winter. Spring is just around the corner, but already many areas of the state have bare, dry ground. Winds have dried things out even more and wildfires are popping up in many locations. So many that the Ranger Report of March 6th has put them all in one listing! Another from that same report illustrates that tickets are being issued!

Towns of Hamilton, Middletown, Russia, Seward, and Stamford, Delaware, Herkimer, Madison, and Schoharie Counties Wildfires: On Feb. 26, Forest Rangers responded to fires caused by debris burning in Delaware and Madison counties, including one, a fire in the town of Hamilton that was more than 20 acres. On Feb. 27, Rangers responded to fires in Delaware and Schoharie counties, both caused by debris burning with wind carrying fire to grassy and wooded areas. On Feb. 29, Rangers responded to a small fire in Herkimer County. To date, the winter season has not provided typical snow cover across much of New York State, leaving dormant vegetation from last year's growing season exposed and susceptible to the daily fluctuations of spring weather.

Town of Ashland Chemung County Law Enforcement: On Feb. 28, the Wellsburg Fire Chief requested Forest Ranger assistance with a wildfire believed to have been started by a person. Ranger Staples walked the perimeter of the 12.5-acre fire to determine its size and issued tickets to the responsible party for endangering the property of another and setting a fire without clearing three feet of inflammable materials.

Please remember that the Statewide Burn Ban went into effect on March 16th and continues through May 14th. To help prevent fires, DEC is advocating extra vigilance; [statewide burn ban goes into effect on March 16](#).

The need for the burn ban has been well documented for years. From the Conservation Commission report of 1923 we find a most interesting list of the causes of forest fires. 16 causes were listed for a total of 236 fires reported. The top causes were: Smokers - 72, Locomotives - 55, Burning Brush - 53, Campers - 14, and Children - 11.

The Lake Placid - North Elba Historical Society holds a winter lecture series to help get you through those cold evenings and this past month on February 15th, they had a great one done by Forest Ranger Kevin Burns. It was recorded and is available for you to view with this link. You will find his stories very interesting: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UH_3B5kfL-M

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Wednesday, April 10th 6:30pm: At the Chenango Bird Club meeting, Laurie Rankin, the Director of the NYS Forest Fire Lookout Association will give a presentation on the history of Fire Towers in New York, with an emphasis on Berry Hill Tower located in McDonough. The meeting will be held at the Roger's Environmental Center.

Bramley Mt Fire Tower: There has been a lot of very positive news surrounding this tower since last month's newsletter. The headline in the local Walton Reporter on February 17th read “*Delhi waives local requirements for Bramley mountain fire tower rebuild.*” The article went on to explain what this all means: “*Residents were more vocal during the second public hearing to grant Delaware County governmental immunity from local regulations, such as a site plan review, for the rebuild of the Bramley Mountain Fire Tower. Delaware County Economic Development Director Glenn Nealis explained the county is not attempting to “get out of anything,” but trying to expedite the permitting process so the tower can be rebuilt and open to the public by spring 2024.*”

Granting governmental immunity would meet the requirements for DEP (New York City Department of Environmental Protection) to grant final approval for a land access permit, Nealis said, “But it will still require the tower to be a sound structure, require a building permit, things like that. This is a county project from start to finish,” Nealis said, and clarified there is no town involvement or liability associated with the project.

Various members of Friends of Bramley Mountain spoke to encourage council members to grant governmental immunity for the project, including President Ann Roberti, who highlighted the widespread community support for the fire tower.

Friends of Bramley Mountain have raised 95% of funds necessary for the fire tower rebuild, Roberti said, from support of the community, Delaware County, and beyond. Delaware County awarded two \$25,000 grants towards the project, Roberti said, as well as other local organizations like the O’Connor Foundation, Musser Fund, Livestock Foundation, Helfgott-Renfro, Delaware County Historical Association, and the Catskill 3500 Club. Friends of Bramley Mountain have also received over 300 individual donations from individuals and businesses in the local community, and from fire tower supporters across the country, Roberti said.

“DEP has supported us, in addition to allowing the tower restoration, but improving the access road and building a big parking area at their expense,” she said.

Volunteers have signed up to staff the fire tower and greet visitors on weekends and holidays, Roberti said, as Friends of Bramley Mountain is providing all funding and assuming responsibility for ongoing maintenance and staffing of the tower.

Currently, approximately 3300 people hike the Bramley Mountain trail each year, Friends of Bramley Mountain Member John Sandman said.

“Once there is a fire tower at the top of the mountain, the number of hikers coming to the Bramley Mountain trail will grow exponentially,” he said.

Based on statistics from other Catskill fire tower trails, Bramley Mountain Fire Tower could draw nearly 10,000 hikers annually, according to Sandman.

Many of those will be from out of area, who will eat at local restaurants, buy gas and groceries, and if traveling a long distance, will stay at local lodging options, Sandman said. According to the Economic Valuation Study for Public Lands in the Central Catskills, Sandman said each hiker who travels to the Catskills spends approximately \$62.70 per visit. The Bramley Mountain Fire Tower could potentially generate an additional \$400,000 in visitor spending each year, he said.

The Bramley Mountain trail is shorter and easier than most Catskill Mountain Trails, Friends of Bramley Mountain member and Delhi resident Barbara Jones said. Once the tower is rebuilt, Jones said it will inspire residents and visitors to hike the trail and improve their fitness. “I can attest to this personally, as my hiking on easier trails inspired me to keep hiking longer and harder trails, and getting more fit in the process.”

Additionally, hikers will have the opportunity to be educated through a volunteer steward program, Jones said. On weekends, a steward will be available to provide education about the tower, and will be available during the week to provide interested local schools with information about the history of fire towers, other nearby local hikes, and how to recreate safely and responsibly.

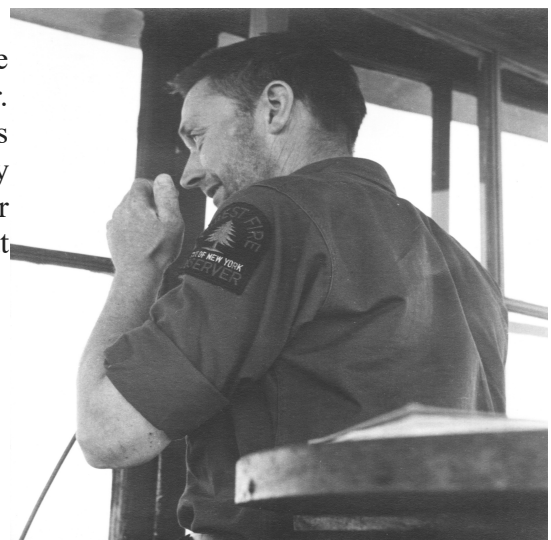
Following the public hearing, during council members' regular meeting, Delaware County's request for governmental immunity was approved."

Since that article was written, the Friends group has met the matching grant challenge through lots of community support! They are also seeking volunteer stewards. If you would like to spend a day or two at the Bramley Mt Fire Tower, please reach out and let them know your interest! <https://www.the-reporter.net/stories/looking-for-a-few-good-stewards,135480?newsletter=135518>

Communication: Communication was key at our fire towers. Last month we talked a bit about the phone systems that were in place to allow an Observer to report smokes to area Forest Rangers. That article sparked some interesting memories for Bill Tindall whose father, George was the Observer at Kempshall Fire Tower. Bill said "Every tower in the the vicinity of Kempshall Mt. had a radio in 1953. It was powered by 1-A and 2-B batteries that were a heavy load to carry up the mountain. It required two trips, or one on the back of our pack donkey. Observers chatted among themselves during the day. I got to know all the nearby tower observers, at least by radio. When I was left alone on the mountain while my father went to town it was the means that I was checked with during the day. During the famous Cold River Fire the radio on Kempshall Mt. provided the communications link between the fire crew and headquarters.

We did have a telephone in the tower and in the cabin. It was an oak case affair with a crank by which the telephone signaled the operator in Long Lake. Back in those days one got to know the operator because it was the operator that answered when the crank was turned. The only routine use of the telephone that I recall was to call in air plane sightings for the government. Any multi engine plane spotted was called in using our tower code and a description of the plane. (I guess radar was not sufficient at that time to reliably detect the Russians). Maintaining the 10+ mile line into Long Lake was a chore my father didn't enjoy. The line down Long Lake was on wood poles. The line up the mountain was on short steel poles drilled into the bed rock. This low section was easier to work on as it did not require fetching the climbing gear and scaling a pole.

Lighting once hit the telephone line and the fireball at the cabin phone was impressive. The radio was in the tower. Phone was in tower and cabin. As I recall the radio was always on when the tower was manned. It was the primary means of communication with Long Lake office and other towers." Thank you so much for all of these details about communication Bill! George Tindall on the radio, 1953.



We had a wonderful historical newspaper piece posted on our Facebook page this month. Posted by Bill Ackroyd was an article from the 1940 Ithaca Journal. It was about the Padlock Hill fire tower (now located at the NYS fairgrounds), then located at the highest point in Tompkins County. The article, entitled “Caroline Fire Tower nears Completion” discussed how the CCC Camp SP125 in Slaterville had been building the tower. It went on to mention “*Just what method of communication will be used to broadcast reports of forest fires which may be observed from the tower room has not been revealed by the conservation department.*”

When did NYS start using radios rather than phones for communication? Did it happen over night with one significant change in policy? Seeking answers to some of these questions led me to some of Retired Forest Ranger Paul Hartmanns extensive notes. Paraphrasing from some of those notes, here is a general time line of how radio communication came to be used in fire towers. In 1932, some experiments were held between an airplane, the state offices and a ground station. But how reliable were they? They were successful in communicating up to 50 miles. The following year, more experiments occurred, including have a radio in Pocatello Fire Tower (now located at Graham Mountain). Continued success led to the Federal Government issuing several frequencies for use in Forest Fire Prevention.

These radios were powered by large and heavy battery packs. Reliability continued to increase and by 1940, radio equipment was installed in 7 trucks and cars. These radios worked in close cooperation with 5 towers and 1 airplane. However, until July 1, 1950, annoying interference was experienced from other emergency services. On this date, all emergency radio services began operating on new frequency channels assigned to them by the FCC under a nation-wide master plan, which provided for more effective utilization of available channels. During the year the Bureau of Forest Fire Control increased its radio units by one mobile unit and four portable units. When the purchase of additional radios was completed the Bureau had the following: 52 battery operated tower radios, 2 AC operated tower radios, 66 mobile units, 3 mobile units-aircraft, 42 portable units, and 6 AC operated District office units.

At St. Regis mountain in 1940, the radio instructions were rather lengthy and included a 4 page document and 16 steps! Thank you for this information Paul!



Oops: Back in January when I listed the towers that were 100 years old, I somehow missed Pillsbury Fire Tower. To protect their private land holdings, the Champlain Realty Company maintained a wooden tower on the mountain until 1924 when it erected the 60 foot Aeromotor LS-40 tower that continues to stand today. The landowner agreed to provide an Observer to watch for smoke during dry weather, though payroll records show that NYS did provide a salary for the Observers. Pillsbury Fire Tower is on the National Historic Register and continues to support two way radio relay equipment. This continues to be very important in that wild and remote area of the Adirondacks.



Observers Sam Fuller 1927
photo courtesy of Hilda Fuller



Observer Jim Page 1946
photo courtesy of Jim Page



Observer Larry Weill 1979
photo courtesy of Bob Eckler

Visits this month: Colfax, Dickinson Hill, Beebe Hill, Grafton Lakes State Park Visitor Center Playground, Goodnow, and Balsam Lake. Unfortunately, the road to Colfax is now listed as private according to the signage. We know the tower could not be climbed and we know the Observer's cabin is now a private residence, but we were sorry we could not at least get a look at the tower and a photo or two.

Until next month.....when Observers would be busy opening their cabins for the season, evicting unwanted squatters (mice), replenishing supplies, and moving all of the necessary equipment into the towers. Are you ready for the spring season?

Laurie