

Roanoke Conference Notes January 2005

Travels to and from Roanoke

Friday January 14 saw FFLA board members heading toward Roanoke, Virginia. Bob Spear and Henry Isenberg, followed by Steve Cummings, started the morning from Steve's Chambersburg, PA residence. Ray Grimes came from New Jersey and Ralph Glover from West Virginia. Rob Hoeye and Gary Weber had each flown into Washington, D.C. the evening before, with Keith Argow chauffeuring them to Roanoke.

On the way, Henry Isenberg and Bob Spear attempted to find the Purgatory Mountain tower, but were unsuccessful. They found a road winding along the base of the mountain and the Purgatory Brook but no way up could be found. They later found out that the tower had been removed years before.

Keith and his charges got a late start after last-minute auto repairs, with their first after-lunch stop being Gibson Mountain. There, above the turkey farm, they found the cab and top section of the tower still on site, the remainder of the tower having been removed for scrap a few years ago. The next stop was the Central Plains tower, which had new communications dishes attached to it. A visit to the tower owner's house found no one home. Buffard's Mountain was next on the list, where a new fence surrounded the tower, which also appeared to have new dishes attached. On a short-cut past Piney Mountain, a locked gate was found on a road that appeared to have potential for leading to the tower, clearly visible a mile away. There was the possibility that the "navigator" (Gary) had missed the correct road, but time didn't allow for further searching. Nearing Rustberg, the quick trip up Long Mountain saw the fire tower dwarfed by communication towers on the mountaintop. The last attempt for the day was to be the Bedford tower. After stopping to obtain permission to go up to the tower in the fading daylight, Keith and Gary got sidetracked with the "good ole boys" who were frying up venison in the shop! By that time, it was too late to hike up the overgrown road, but they were welcomed back at another time. Arriving in Roanoke a short time later, they soon found Ray, Bob, and Henry.

Sunday's touring started with Glen leading the group to Hanging Rock Fire Tower (photo on front page). It was noted that locally, all lookout structures seem to be called "fire towers" even if they are cabins on the ground! Leaving Hanging Rock, the group separated, with Keith and crew heading north and Glen and his group returning to Roanoke.

Once back at Roanoke, Bob and Ray traveled to Gibson Ridge, where they found the tower without problem, but did not walk up to it as it was posted private land behind a closed gate. From there they went to Grassy Hill, meeting up with Henry again. Evening shadows were closing in fast but they located the tower and got to it just at dark, quickly snapping flash photos.

Meanwhile, Keith, Rob, and Gary saw Duncan Knob from the distance as they went by, but due to road conditions and time, did not attempt the several mile side-trip. At a roadside welding shop, they spotted the cab and top two sections of what was presumed to have been the Sounding Knob tower, which had been removed from its nearby summit last year. Late in the afternoon, they reached their goal for the day, High Knob, with its unique stone-based fire tower (photo on front). Both the CCC stone work and the recent cab restoration were impressive!

While Rob and Gary were flying home on Monday, Bob, Henry, and Ray were still working their way north with one last Virginia tower to attempt, Deer Head. They located the road leading to the tower, but were stopped at a closed gate clearly marked "Private Drive". By then it was really cold and they didn't need much encouragement to stay inside their warm vehicles as they continued toward home!

The Conference opened with the intro by Chairman Keith Argow at shortly after 8:30 January 15th at the Washington Jefferson National Forest headquarters in Roanoke, Va.

In attendance were as follows:

Rob Hoeye Oregon Oregon Chapter NHLR Webmaster, outgoing National Historian
Ray Grimes Jr, outgoing Secretary, New Jersey Chapter
Gary Weber Idaho, Idaho Chapter; Newsletter editor and Nat'l Treasurer
Bob Spear New Jersey, New Jersey Chapter (co-director) Restoration fund chair
Henry Isenberg Massachusetts Southern New England Chapter, FFLA Website

Steve Cummings Pennsylvania, "Keystone Chapter"
Keith Argow Virginia, Virginia Chapter, Nat'l Chairman NHLR
Glen Stapleton Virginia Virginia Chapter, Washington Jefferson Nat'l Forest USFS
Ralph Glubber retired assistant State Forester, West Virginia Representative
Bill Campbell General District assistant retired; Washington Jefferson Nat'l Forest 1936-1977
Jerry Buchanan Washington Jefferson Nat'l Forest retired Facilities Engineer

(11 people)

Intro from Glen Stapleton about the National Forest

The US Forest Service manages 193 million acres nation wide, 1.8 million acres comprises the Washington Jefferson National Forest, it is the largest single area now managed by the USDA Forest Service, encompassing almost the entire length of Virginia and a good deal of West Virginia. Currently the forest has 10 Ranger districts, which will soon be cut down, to just 8 Ranger districts. The area serviced will not be lessened, but the areas of the districts will increase to recombine into 8 districts.

The 2 National Forests (Washington), (Jefferson) were combined in 1995 into 1 Forest
The US Forest Service had been selling as much as 30 million board feet of timber a year but in recent times, this number has been on the decrease due to new directives and policies.

Warden box system

For many years the National forest maintained a system of 19 "warden boxes" (fire cache). These were wood in construction about the size of a pickup bed and were positioned in strategic locations throughout the forest. These boxes contained firefighting tools. Often several fire swatters (a long handled tool with a rubber flap attached used for smothering a forefront) perhaps several double bit axes, some throwing shovels (a specially angled pointed shovel used for heaving sand) perhaps some types of brush clearing tools and some other equipment necessary for fighting wildfires. Also, early day Warden boxes contained carbide head lanterns, which were a cotton cap, mounting a miner's type carbide lantern on it, with a few extra carbide cartridges. (Glen had one of these to show us)

Glen recounted a story that one time when he had first started on the Nat'l Forest, he was given the assignment to find one of these warden boxes that had not been accounted for. After much searching in that particular area, "I located the missing box in an old overgrown meadow" I had to bust off the old US Forest service lock as it would no longer open. When I opened the lid, I found all the tools correctly there, the

inventory sheet on the inside lid and everything was in order. The last time this particular Warden box had been inventoried was in 1951! .

Glen continued to say that he had been one of the speakers at the FFLA Wicomico Conference on the Eastern shore some years ago and he was delighted to be the host of this 15th year meeting of the Association.

Jerry Buchanan

Facilities engineer (ret.) Washington Jefferson National Forest. spoke about the various buildings, camps and fire towers that were found on the National forest. The Jefferson National Forest was formed in 1936 from the previous Natahala National Forest, the Unaka National Forest and the Potomac National Forest. Together they formed the Natural Bridge Unit of the Forest Service.

"Some of the earliest fire towers on the forest were what I always called "Phone booths" because that's about the size these shelters were". For the lack of a better name, they were referred to as such during this presentation, although this is not the correct term to use to describe such a Lookout point. "These small shed like structures predated the more modern towers and were only meant as shelters for the observer to get into during inclement conditions"

"Much of the fire towers were constructed during the CCC era. Damascus camp remains the largest CCC era camp still there". Natural Bridge camp was a federal camp, also used as an internment facility for Asian Americans during World War 2 and is now active as a detention camp."

"On the Clinch district" in the Virginia coal fields was many fire towers fairly close together because of the terrain there"... Jasper Cliff on the Kentucky, Virginia border was removed. It was a steel tower with 14'X 14' cab and was sold. Brad Clark was an operator

The famous or (infamous) Lucky Strike cigarette ad which has been in circulation lately over the internet and FFLA circles features the US Forest Service uniformed operator, puffing on a Lucky Strike cigarette while sighting his Osborn fire finder on a distant smoke. The fellow in the picture actually was Red Lester, the district ranger at the time. The film crew was unhappy with the "look" of the actor they had originally conscripted for the ad and asked Red if he would consent to do it instead. He did and that was how it came to be. The Fire tower used in the film shoot was Bald Mountain in the New Castle Ranger district of Virginia

Unfortunately and sadly, Red Lester was later killed in a helicopter crash in the 50's piloting a Bell 47 chopper that hit power lines on the National forest.

High Knob (South Clinch District) is still there but in questionable shape. It is a 14'X14' cab on the ground. The set of plans to build it came from the California forest service and the design is a

copy of Brasstown bald lookout.

It was never totally completed and it was designed as a public observation lookout. It suffers greatly from vandalism. The "Flat Woods job Corps" actually built it.

Olander Lookout is a steel 60' tower with 14' X 14' cab with corrugated tin roof (Cl 160 model, Keith Argow)

Osborn ridge Coburn, Virginia above Dungannon was built by Caldwell Tank in Kentucky. It was almost brand new, then abandoned and now is torn down.

"Harold Sutherland says there are two complete towers in Wise County in storage somewhere. John Stalworth has a great interest in fire towers."

"There were four CL 100 towers."

Pine mountain steel was near Jasper Cliff (two separate towers)

Birch Knob was a 14'X14' steel with a peaked roof (dunce cap roof; Keith Argow)

Mt Rodgers Holston district

Feather Camp a steel tower 14'X14' cab of 40 ft high

Comers' Rock had a 14'X14' wooden cab on a stone base. It had terrific views of Withfield Va. and North Carolina. It's still standing but the stone work is getting bad and the cab is now gone.

Jones Knob is a cabin on top of a hill by "Brush Creek" and "Orange Branch" It's a 14'X14' 80 foot tall tower*

Quebec tower at the "Bowler fish hatchery" was a 30-foot tall straight-legged tower

Walker Mountain tower (site) the legs of which are still there was a 40-foot tower and used to be on the Appalachian Trail.

Blacksburg (District?) Allen fields was a 7'X7' tower above Angel falls

Flat top was a 14' X 14' wood pole tower that was changed to a steel forest service tower and today is a massive electronics site. The "wildlife cabin" there was never moved.

Butt Mountain a 7' X 7' steel 20 foot tall tower is in descent shape, is a State Tower built by the CCC's from the Penfield camp.

Walker Mountain a 14 'X 14', never had a cab and was staffed by Stuart Kline

Apple Orchard tower on the Glenwood Ranger district was eventually moved to Purgatory mountain (but Keith Argow says he doesn't think it was moved?) Purgatory mountain tower however is now gone*

Hanging Rock (tower*) West Virginia

was on private land but now on the National Forest. It was the location of one of those "phone booth" type lookout shelters originally. The wooden tower (lookout) that replaced the early day shelter was burned to the ground by vandals. Photos of it are on the wall at the National forest headquarters building. The present 14'X14' lookout was built on the same location which is aptly named for the slanted cliff it is on, supported by three cinder block columns on it's east side. It is used today as a Hawk watch location hangingrock.org (website)

"Hanging Rock photo" from Keith Argow below right:

Pott's mountain tower

A 7' X7' foot original size was rebuilt as a 14'X14' tower (R6 type) above "White Rock"

Pound Gap Clinch District

was located southwest on "Pine Mountain" and was on the National forest boundary with Kentucky. The State of Kentucky put it up there (Buchanan)

Cove mountain tower

A 14' X14' tower was given back to the land owners.

"On the George Washington National Forest"

High Knob (North) was accessed by a "landlocked trail" on the Dry River Ranger district. It had the distinction of having been built by World War One veterans and the CCC's.

Sugar Loaf

Was finished in 1941, located outside of Charlottesville*

Reddish Knob tower Dry Rivers Ranger district (Bridgewater)

A 14' X 14' cab was a 20-foot tall tower and is long gone. It incorporated a "Dunce cap" type roof used in Region 8 for snow load capabilities. There is one set of blue prints that exist for this.

Duncan tower Warm Springs Ranger district

Is no longer owned by the National Forest but now by the Virginia State Police for radio equipment. A deeded transaction.

7' X 7' tower Unknown name by airport (Keith Argow) incomplete information

Sugar Knob was a trail shelter, flat roofed, a residence for two patrol points, may have originally been a tree top tower. (Argow)

Kennedy Knob Gone, Lee District

Was on the north end of Massanutten mountain CCC area.

"There were twenty seven active lookouts in the Forest when I came on the District"..Argow

Elliot Knob (Deerfield)

Is still standing, has purple glass in it and a fence around it and is an electronics site.

Bill Campbell had to leave early and he was thanked with appreciation by all for coming to the Conference and sharing with us his many memories of work with the Forest Service in his long career 1936 to 1977

Conference notes continued.....

Voting

Teller's Report

16 votes were cast, 14 out of 16 voted

There was 1 write in vote

Results were: Rob Hoeye, outgoing National Historian was elected National Secretary

Bob Spear, NJ Chapter was elected National Historian

Dave Bula WA Chapter was re-elected Western deputy chair

Restoration Report

There was one request for funding from Marty Podskoch for the Utsayantha fire tower project in New York State that was approved in calendar year 2004

Other reports given:

Answerman and Awards reports were given

State Reports

At the time of this meeting there were no reports from Kentucky* , Minnesota, Maine, Delaware/Maryland. New Hampshire report was read by Henry Isenberg

New Hampshire has their fire towers budgeted to the end of 2006

New Hampshire has a new Chief of Forest Fire Division, Brad Simpkin (Steve Cummings)

Western Region report was addressed by Chairman Argow

*It was noted that much of the more extensive information in the Western Report was not received by anyone else except the Chairman.

Oregon remains the largest paid membership chapter.

National Historic Lookout Register

The present total on the register is 599. The NHLR Webmaster has not as yet updated the site with all those on the listing.

The "SILVER CREEK" fire tower NHLR certificate was presented by Chairman Argow to Keystone Chapter, Steve Cummings.

Membership

There presently is 795 paid memberships with 856 total names on the roster of the FFLA This is an increase of 82 from January 1st 2004
It was estimated that 30% came from Website visitors and 70% from brochures*

Budget

A new operating budget was worked out and approved by those attending. The closing balance for 2004 for the FFLA was \$22,804.00. *The entire 2004 budget was not received by some Chapters who could not download the email portion of the text.

National Woodlands Mag. (note)

Annual cost to FFLA members will drop from \$12.00 to \$5.00

OLD BUISNESS

Disposition policy

The excerpts prepared for this Lookout disposition policy of the FFLA was read by Chairman Argow. Points were gone over. Some present questioned if such a "policy" was even warranted or necessary as it was viewed more as a "political statement" and not any kind of a workable tool of the FFLA. It was pointed out by Steve Cummings (Pa.) that some organizations, i.e. the Pennsylvania forest fire museum association was waiting for a statement of what the FFLA's stand was on how fire towers/lookouts should be viewed. The numerous points were again read.

A vote to pass the resolution was called. The voting was not unanimous, however enough were successful to pass the Disposition policy as read.

Future Conferences

Summer 2005 will be in Rhode Island, August 19th thru the 21st at West Greenwich, Rhode Island Fire Department, which also has their own fire tower they erected behind the firehouse. Henry Isenberg will be working this out.

Fall 2005 Western will be in McCall, Idaho

A Colorado rafting expedition, headed by Dave Lorenz, AZ/NM will go on this year, contact Dave for details.

Various Chapter meetings will go on this year, contact State directors for info.

The 2006 "National Conference" was projected for Oregon, 14th and 15th of January at Klaskeni. Wilsonville Center at the Magnus tree farm south of Portland.

A 2006 Conference in the Summer or early Fall is being planned for New Jersey to help celebrate the 100th anniversary of the State's Forest Fire Service. Bob Wolff and Bob Spear and the NJ Chapter will be planning this. Hopefully at Kittatinny Valley State Park in Andover, (the site of 2 previous FFLA conferences) at the new facility being built for the Bureau of Parks and Forestry. A "Fly in" at the Aeroflex air attack base may also be part of the activities during that time.

Conferences continued....

It was expressed by many that advanced planning and announcements for future conferences is beneficial for those having to travel and make plans. However it is also a view that much of that advanced planning perhaps as much as two years ahead cannot be met anyhow by some folks with limited budgets and uncertain job situations.

Other business

A pewter belt buckle to be produced by Pat Lynch's Western Heritage Company in Encampment, Wyoming featuring the FFLA logo insignia was passed after a sample buckle was distributed around to show the quality. There was some confusion at first by those who thought the buckle being passed around was what we were voting on to have produced, until it was pointed out that this was merely an example of quality and not the USFS, Department of the Interior buckle.

A "Chairman's Award" for several people was gone over and Chairman Argow advised that he would take care of this himself through his office in Vienna Va.

The long anticipated "Movie", brought up by Steve Cummings, and about the FFLA was talked about. It was put forth by Steve that folks should be encouraged to take VHS tapes of fire towers/lookouts and other FFLA activities and then someone should assemble all this into some sort of a usable archive for distribution. It was argued by several that it wasn't simply a matter of doing that anymore these days as technology is quickly outstripping even the latest forms of this sort of product. Today, everything is digital production and VHS tape is getting as outmoded as a model A ford truck. Next year it may very well be something else. The New Jersey director advised that a recent digital movie put on CD ROM disk was done about Sterling fire tower by a "first time" user of this technology resulting in near professional quality. But to do it, what was needed was a near professional grade digital movie camera.

Still, Steve's point is well taken, efforts should be on going with this train of thought and such a project can only benefit the Association. It was also pointed out that Dave Quam's previous videos with the FFLA logo is still being used by some at displays.

Chronology of the FFLA

This has been a single effort of the New Jersey Co director now for some time, basically as a New Jersey Chapter project, but now viewed as a National effort. It of course is on going as each year, new conferences take place. The author (now elected as National Historian) will send the latest copy to the Forest History Society in Durham North Carolina for the FFLA archives there.*

A motion was entertained to forward as much Lookout information as becomes available to the National Historian so that such information can be used for the benefit of the Forest Fire Lookout Association as a group. It was also reminded that as of the last Conferences it had been decided to send such information as possible and as is practical

to the Forest History Society in Durham, North Carolina. Chairman Argow also reminded that there also was one other place we all had agreed on as well, being the Pennsylvania Forest Fire Museum.

This was passed, but afterwards, some private talk was that the "scope of the position should be limited". It was and is unknown what the meaning of this inferred. A brief discussion ensued as to the title of "Historian" or "Archivist" Some viewed the titles (meaning the same thing) Others viewed a difference in the title of the two as one (Historian) meaning "gathering information pertinent to Lookouts/fire towers and all associated subject material" and that of Archivist as one who, in our case, secures the information of the Association, Business matters, bylaws, Constitution and all aspects of it. The bylaws of the FFLA were read concerning the matter of National Historian, and it is the opinion of this newly elected National Historian, that our bylaws spell it out correctly as it concerns us. There was no further discussion but this is viewed as one of the "critical" lynchpins of our Association.

Certificate of membership

It was brought forward that a "certificate" signifying Membership in the FFLA should be produced. It was offered that such a certificate could be manufactured and put on the merchandise list in the Newsletter and website offered for a fee of \$5.00. It was argued that such a certificate should be part of a "Welcome New member" packet anyhow and it would be doubtful if a member would pay \$5.00 for such a certificate anyway. It was uncertain if this was agreed to in any official manner.

Decals

Steve Cummings (Pa.) brought forth a motion to produce FFLA decals. It was advised that FFLA decals had already been produced many years before by Dave Quam who had secured permission at a previous Conference to do this. That supply had long since been used up and no one had produce anymore since. The motion to renew the supply was judged not necessary and if a Chapter wished to produce FFLA decals, they could do so providing the original concept was not altered.

Pennsylvania information

CLARK KNOB fire tower located outside of Shippensburg Pa. near the Letterkenny Army depot still stands according to Henry who visited there last year. Pg 76. Pa Gazetteer It is a "tower within a tower" meaning the stairways were added later as an independent structure. There are two cabs on it. The top cab is larger than the fire observation cab below it. It stands behind a fenced area and is not accessible without permission but there is a road right up to it.

The latest Pennsylvania Research updates and information were downloaded to the computer at the Research & Contact Station at Chambersburg, Pa. as was the "Chronology of the FFLA" document.

Closing notes

There not being any other business to transact, it was moved to close the business portion of the January 2005 conference. Before closing, a brief discussion went on about

times to meet in the morning for the Tower tour and which fire towers we all would try and get to, route of travel, etc. All that accomplished, Chairman Argow brought down the gavel (softly) on the well-used Government property tables we were using and closed the January session of the FFLA.

Gibson mtn cab; Gary Weber

Gibson Mtn cabin; Gary Weber

High Knob Lookout; Gary Weber

Keith at High Knob; Gary Weber

Rustberg fire tower (Long Mtn) Va. :Weber

Sounding Knob fire tower Va.:Gary Weber

Group photo Hanging Rock Lookout, West Virginia, Allegheny Trail

Conference room

Break....

**From top: The Conference room @ USFS headquarters, Roanoke, 3rd-Carbide head lamp, G.Stapleton
4th- Gary Weber 5th lookout blueprints 6th FS Emblem 7th-hall mural at headquarters
8th Hanging Rock West Virginia 9th a unique catwalk drain at Hanging Rock**

.....

.....

.....

From: "Bob Spear" <smokerangerbob@earthlink.net>
To: <GSTAPLETON@F.S.Fed.us>; <argow@cs.net>; <weblookout@imbris.net>
Subject: Fire towers Va.
Date: Tuesday, January 18, 2005 5:03 PM

Glen:

Just want to thank you for a great Conference location and trip over to Hanging rock on Sunday. It was as good as any "lookout adventure" can get!.....enjoyed the beautiful Virginia and West Virginia countryside as well.

After we got back to the headquarters building in Roanoke, Ray Grimes and I travelled Southwest down below

Christianburg to the Gibson Ridge fire tower. We found it without any problem but did not walk up to it as it appeared to all be private land and posted as well behind a closed gate. I took several digital photos from the distant roadway and have more on my 35mm camera to get developed. Those I took with my telephoto lens.

I've enclosed the one digital that came out OK at a distance. The tower appears to be in excellent shape, even repainted silver, but has no windows I could see. There is a large Cell phone antenna attachment on the roof of the tower which detracts from the traditional "fire tower" look.

From there we went back to Roanoke and then headed Southeast toward GRASSY HILL FIRE TOWER. Evening shadows were closing in fast but we located the fire tower standing prominently on the summit of the hill just west of highway 220. By a circular route of secondary roads, (Grassy Hill road) we found new development at the base of the hill. By that time we were chasing the last of daylight but Henry located a new road up to a brand new water tank just below the summit. There are radio antennas also on the hill but we could not find the entrance . We elected to park at the water tank and go bush wacking it the rest of the way up the hill, hand over hand in spots. The woods there lays thick with dry oak leaves maybe a foot deep and some steep rocks which we had to climb up and over. I was worried about Henry but he kept coming ! I got to the summit first just at dark and quickly snapped some photos with a flash , (not sure how they're come out).. The tower, (Aermotor) 60 foot tall has two small communications dishes just under the cab, Several windows are shattered in the cab and it was surrounded by a fence. There are large radio masts also installed nearby and two small electronics buildings.

By the time Henry and Ray made it up it was totally after dark, they had flashlights and after a breather, they went back the way they came. I decided to find out where the road came out so with my small flashlight in hand I went down that way. The road is well used, with gravel surface. About a thousand feet down it split in two directions. Fortunately for me I chose the right way, and despite being very muddy and rutted, I eventually came out down the mountain on Grassy Hill road. The other direction headed toward route 220 some distance away and that would have been a much longer walk in the dark. There is a gate just down from the summit

with Sheriff's department signs on it. When I reached the paved road it started snowing. I had to wait about 45 minutes for Ray and Henry to find me, then we headed back in a sometimes blinding snow squall. By the time we reached the Blue Ridge Parkway the road was covered with snow and it was coming down hard. But in Roanoke it was just rain.

On Monday morning after breakfast we headed North up I-81 and headed for DEER HEAD FIRE TOWER west of the Interstate about 10 miles. North of Harrisonburg, we located Deer Head on the backward slope of a steep mountain there. The road leads right up to the tower but we stopped at a closed gate after going about 200 yards up a road clearly marked "Private Drive". By then it was really cold and we didn't need much encouragement to stay inside our warm vehicles!... We went back down the road where we got some long distance photos of the tower. Through my lens I could see it was probably another old Aermotor type, had a semi rusty roof, partially painted white and could see no windows in it. There didn't appear to be any radio stuff mounted on it and it has a commanding view of that entire area.

Back on I-81 again we headed north for Chambersburg Pa. and Steve Cumming's house. Ray Grimes left us after Deer Head tower and headed north to Harrisburg Pa. Henry and I got to Steve's around 3:30, Monday afternoon, Steve hadn't arrived home yet so we went to Fayetteville for dinner. Steve arrived around 5 p.m. and we spent the night there and headed North today around Noon. As I write this Henry should be nearing home in Massachusetts. Thanks again for being a wonderful host for the Roanoke meeting, it was appreciated by all of us who could come.

As soon as I get the other photos developed I'll send you what I took.

Regards,
Bob Spear