



# 2008 Annual Report

## Forest Fire Lookout Association

### New York Division

Bill Starr – State Director



2008 was another busy year for restoring fire towers and Observer's cabin here in New York. Work continued with our local chapters at Beebe Hill and Pillsbury Mtn. as well with the use of FFLA grant funded projects at Mt. Adams, Mt. Beacon and Page Pond Hill (see the "Lookout Network" Autumn 2008 for details of the Mt. Beacon project). Although our local chapters at Pillsbury and Wakely Mountains have been experiencing bureaucratic red tape from the NYS-DEC Region 5 and work has yet to begin on the restoration of the fire tower and Observer's cabin at either location.

2009 marks the Centennial of the fire towers here in New York. In 1909 the state began operating forest fire lookout stations with crudely built towers made from timbers found on the mountaintops.



*The Cathead Mtn wooden fire tower in 1910*

In 1916 the state introduced the standard steel fire tower with the purchase of ten Aermotor model LL-25 fire towers, nine of which were placed into service in 1916.



*The Aermotor model LL-25 tower on Makomis Mtn in 1916*

After the initial purchase of the model LL-25 fire towers the state began utilizing the Aermotor model LS-40 fire towers beginning in 1917. Systematically each of the old wooden towers was replaced with an Aermotor fire tower until when in 1933 all fire towers in New York were equipped with a steel fire tower.

The fire tower system eventually grew to a level where 110 fire towers were operated simultaneously each year by the NYS Conservation Dept. from Long Island, up through the Catskill and Taconic ranges, into the Adirondacks, across the Tug Hill Plateau and out to the western sections of New York along the Southern Tier.

Through budget cut backs the NYS Dept. of Environmental Conservation discontinued the operation of the fire tower system at the end of the 1990 fire season. By 1994 funding to continue the aerial fire detection program ceased as well. Even though the fire towers are no longer used to detect wild fires they continued to serve the people of New York by offering outdoor recreational destinations and to eventually again offer outdoor educational opportunities at the restored fire towers.

Therefore the fire towers have been serving the people of New York for 100 years and to commemorate this Centennial the FFLA will be launching several projects to mark this milestone beginning with the sale of a commemorative patch.



*The Centennial commemorative patch.*

Several of the fire tower restoration groups across New York have joined in with the sale of these patches in an effort to raise awareness of the Centennial and to also use the sale as a way of raising funds for their individual projects.

Due in large part to the exceptional high gasoline prices during the first half of 2008 volunteers found it to be quite challenging to drive to the various fire tower projects to participate in restoration work or to greet and visit hikers to the fire towers. Although the high fuel prices cut into this work it does not mean that all efforts came to a stand still.

### **The Beebe Hill Local Chapter:**

Work began on the morning of April 5, 2008 with the gracious participation from members of the Ironworkers Union – Local 10 in Albany, NY.

The engineer from the NYS-DEC called for structural and safety improvements to be done on the 60 foot Aermotor model LS-40 fire tower and the Ironworkers proved to be a tremendous help in accomplishing this task.



*Bill Starr, Forest Ranger Lt. Darryl Kittle and Union President Ron Clapper discuss the project on the April 5<sup>th</sup> work day.*



*Members of Local 10 working on the fire tower.*

The engineer wanted new bolts and nuts installed where the structural “X” braces are bolted onto the legs of the tower. Then he wanted the hand rails on the top three stairway landings raised to an elevation of 42”, but it was decided to raise the handrails on all the landings and stairways to the same height and to install a mid-rail for an additional safety measure.





*The Ironworkers of Local 10, NYS-DEC Forest Rangers and Chapter members on the April 5<sup>th</sup> work day.*

In addition to the hand railings along the fire tower stairway wire safety meshing was also installed around each landing platform on the tower.



*FFLA members Eric Hepperle, John Wheeler and deputy state director Bob Eckler install the wire safety meshing.*

Additional items must still be accomplished on the fire tower after which restoration of the Observer's cabin interior will begin. Eventually chapter members will be able to stay overnight in the cabin at the fire tower on weekends to greet and talk with visitors to the fire tower.

## The Berry Hill Chapter:

FFLA member Fred Lamb will be heading up the restoration project at Berry Hill. The appropriate application to begin this project was submitted to the NYS-DEC Region 7 in the Fall and we are awaiting final approval before work can begin.

The 59' 6" International Derrick model 1933 fire tower current supports two-way radio repeater antennas and due to FCC regulations on the dangers of radiation exposure unauthorized personnel are not allowed to climb the fire tower. An effort is ongoing within the NYS-DEC to erect a remote mono-pole structure to move the antennas on to so that the fire tower may again be open to the public.

In the meantime restoration of the Observer's cabin will begin as soon as the restoration application has been approved.



*The Berry Hill fire tower and Observer's cabin in 2002.*



## The Page Pond Hill Project:

The restoration of the Page Pond Hill fire tower facility began in the Fall of 2007 by former deputy state director Warren Johnsen with a \$500 restoration grant from the FFLA. Restoration of the cabin and fire tower continued with work days in 2008 and it is planned that members of the FFLA-NY will complete this project in 2009.



*Deputy state director Bob Eckler and Fred Lamb begin staining the cabin exterior.*



*FFLA-NY member and former Page Pond Hill forest fire observer Tom Murphy repairs a window on the cabin.*



*The Page Pond Hill fire tower  
International Derrick model 1933 - 76' 9" tall.*



*The FFLA-NY volunteers in front of the Page Pond Hill cabin.*

## Pillsbury Mtn. Project:

The restoration of the cabin and fire tower at Pillsbury Mtn. is being headed up by deputy state director. Late in the summer vandals made an attempt to enter the boarded up cabin by peeling away siding from a corner of the cabin and they further damaged the roof of the cabin by driving one of the porch roof support poles through the cabin roof and into the interior of the cabin. As the facility appears rundown and no efforts on the way to saving the cabin the appearance is that no one routinely visits the facility and therefore the danger of a vandal being caught is quite low.



Both the cabin and fire tower are listed on the National Register of Historic Places and the National Historic Lookout Register through the nominations submitted by FFLA state director Bill Starr.

Bob and Scott Eckler were able to secure funds from the NYS-DEC to temporarily repair the damage done to the cabin and a new roof shall be installed on the cabin in 2009. As for the red tape talks will be conducted with DEC to eliminate this problem for 2009.



*Damage to the cabin exterior.*



*Repair of the damage*



*Interior damage to the cabin when the pole was rammed through the roof.*



*FFLA-NY Scott Eckler temporarily patched the cabin roof.*

### **The Mount Adams Project:**

The Mt. Adams facility is contained in a tract of land that was purchased by the Open Space Institute of New York (O.S.I.) from N.L. Industries. As O.S.I. has retained ownership of the land where the Observer's cabin and the fire tower stand upon.

The Mt. Adams group received a \$500 restoration grant from the FFLA and the station has been listed on the National Register of Historic Places and the National Historic Lookout Register through nominations submitted by FFLA state director Bill Starr.

The fire tower, a 47' Aermotor model LS-40, has been painted and had new wooden steps were installed by the NYS-DEC and a new foot trail up the mountain has been up the mountain.

cut.



The cabin at Mt. Adams is one of the first standard design Observer's cabin introduced by the state in 1922 which was built on the mountain in that same year. The Mt. Adams cabin is the only surviving model 1922 cabin left in New York and the members of the group have been making significant progress in it's restoration.

Restoration work to the cabin will continue in 2009 as well to the fire tower. Half of the roof blew off of the fire tower in 2006 and new roof panels have been made and will be installed on the fire tower by the NYS-DEC.



*The rundown cabin in 2004.*



*The Mt. Adams fire tower with a fresh coat of paint.*



*The cabin under restoration in 2008.*



*New cabin footings and drainage.*



*The Mt. Adams cabin in 1964.*



## The Wakely Mtn. Chapter:

The chapter members are awaiting final approval of their Adopt-A-Nature resource application by the NYS-DEC before work can begin on the Wakely Mtn facility.

The fire tower is one of the original ten steel fire towers introduced in 1916 an Aermotor model LL-25. The Wakely Mtn. tower is the tallest of these ten standing 70 feet high and it is the only remaining LL-25 with any portion of the original exterior ladder still attached to the super-structure.

The Wakely Mtn. facility is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and the National Historic Lookout Register through nominations submitted by Indian Lake Town historian Bill Zullo and state director Bill Starr.

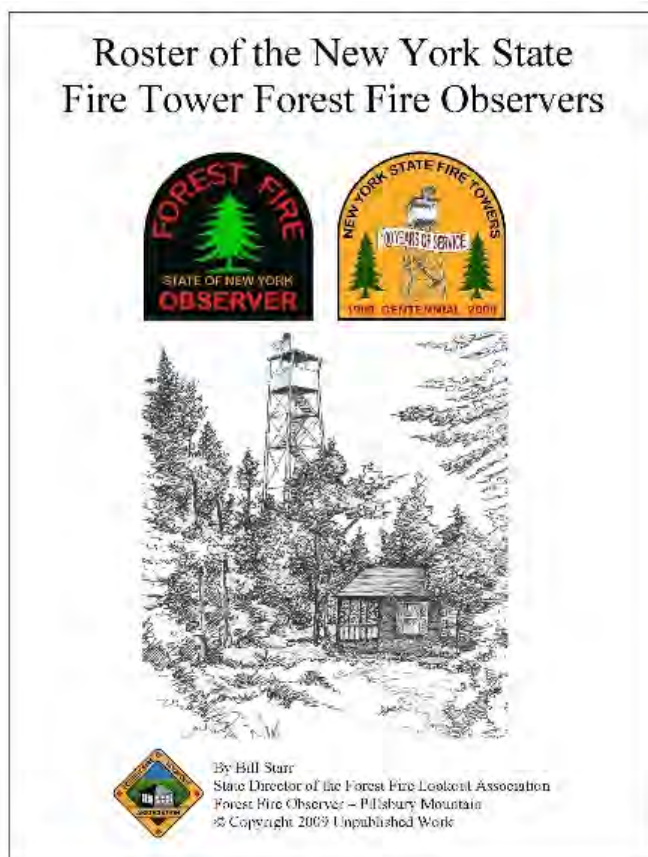
The cabin at Wakely does not qualify for listing on the National register as it was built in 1967 and does not fall under the 50 year rule.



*The Aermotor model LL-25 fire tower on Wakely Mtn in 2005.*

## Under development for 2009:

One project long overdue is researching in the old index card payroll file of the old Bureau of Forest Fire Control in order to create a roster of all the men and women who served as a Forest Fire Observer at each of the bureau's fire towers.



This project will be quite an undertaking as the index card file is set up alphabetically by each persons name regardless of their job title. Although the timing for this project could not be any better as we will be celebrating the Centennial of New York's fire towers through 2009. This roster should be completed by the end of February of 2009 and will be available as a free download on the Beebe Hill Chapter's web site at [www.beebehill.info](http://www.beebehill.info).

