

History of the Beebe Hill Fire Tower

Austerlitz, N.Y. - Beebe Hill is the third location that this one 60 foot Aermotor model #LS-40 fire tower has stood upon. In 1928 the Taconic State Park Commission, of Copake Falls, NY, purchased a fire tower to protect park lands with a means to detect wildfires in their early stages. Ironically the best site for the fire tower to view the entire park was slightly over the state line in Massachusetts on Alander Mountain, locally pronounced "A-Lander".

The site, and surrounding forest, was owned by Frederick K. Miles of Mount Washington, Mass. Mr. Miles utilized the trees from his forest in the production of charcoal. The person who staffed the fire tower for the park was Mervin Whitbeck a resident of Mount Washington, Mass. and employee of Mr. Miles.

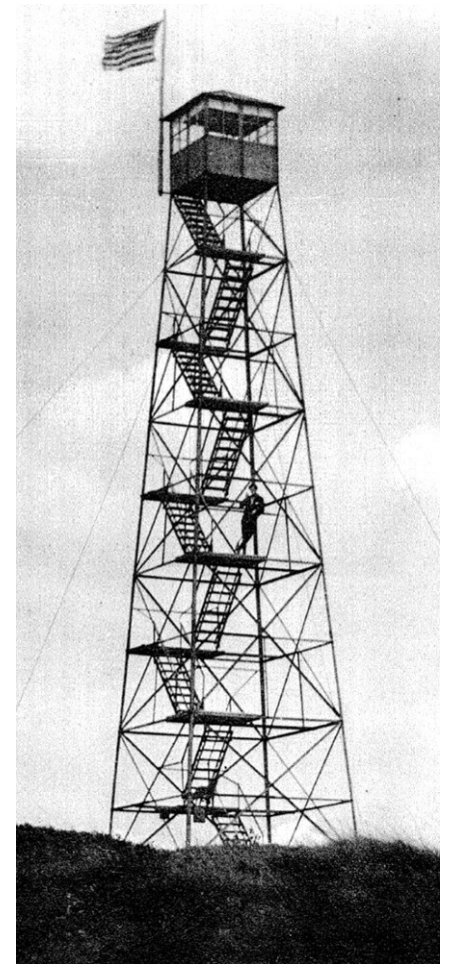
In May and June of 1928 and 1929 the NYS Bureau of Forest Fire Control paid the salary of Mr. Whitbeck through the state park. Otherwise Mr. Whitbeck's salary was the responsibility of the Taconic State Park.

During a dry period in 1930 the fire tower was not manned for some unknown reason and subsequently a wildfire erupted and burned a large portion of Mr. Miles' forest land. Upon extinguishing the fire Mr. Miles instructed the park to immediately remove the fire tower. By the end of the year the fire tower was dismantled and removed from the site, but the ground cabin was left behind.

The park stored the fire tower, in pieces, on a private farm in High Valley. In 1932 the park secured an agreement to re-erect the fire tower on the privately owned lands of Washburn Mountain.

The fire tower was re-erected by a C.C.C. crew in late 1932 when the administration of the facility was taken over by the NYS Bureau of Forest Fire Control. The fire tower remained in operation on Washburn Mtn. up through the end of the 1964 fire season. At that time a crew of Conservation Department laborers and Forest Ranger Stanley Engle, of Ghent, dismantled the fire tower and arranged to have the pieces transported to the Beebe Hill site via helicopter.

Work began immediately in November of 1964 to re-erect the fire tower on Beebe Hill. Construction was not completed until April of 1965 when the Beebe Hill facility began operations. The Beebe Hill forest fire observatory operated up through the end of the 1987 fire season when it was decommissioned.



On Alander Mountain circa 1929

