



Beebe Hill Chapter  
of the  
Forest Fire Lookout Association  
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## 2008 Annual Report



As 2008 comes to an end at the Beebe Hill fire tower it is time once again to review this year's accomplishments and to lay out a plan for 2009.



1909 – Hunter Mountain

It is important to note that in 2009 we will be celebrating the Centennial of the fire towers in New York State. 1909 was the year that the New York State Forest, Fish and Game Commission began operating forest fire lookout towers to combat the increasing loss to forest fires in New York. These first sentinels guarded over our forest lands until 1916 when the steel fire towers, we know today, were introduced. Made entirely of timbers from

the mountain summits these log towers offered no protection for the Forest Fire Observers against the cold, wind, rain and hot sun. Even though the fire towers were created for a single purpose they quickly evolved into facilities serving several functions. Most notably as popular recreational destinations for the public, as such the cab of a fire tower was once referred to as a “*mountaintop classroom*” offering outdoor educational opportunities for the state agency. Although the fire towers ceased to operate in 1990 they still serve the people of New York in this educational and recreational function.

Due in large part to the extremely high gasoline prices during 2008 much of the work planned for the Beebe Hill facility was put on hold as it became too expensive for chapter volunteers to travel and participate in work days at the fire tower. Although important work was accomplished during the year.

Public safety is the number one priority at Beebe Hill and specific improvements to the fire tower had been called for in the DEC Engineer's inspection report of the fire tower. The Ironworkers of Local Union # 12 in Albany volunteered their skills and services to satisfy the Engineer's requirements.



On Saturday, April 5, 2008 twelve members of Local Union # 12 arrived at Beebe Hill to begin the work of replacing all of the “X” brace bolts and to raise the hand railings of the stairway system on the fire tower.



*FFLA state director Bill Starr, Lt. Darryl Kittle and Union President Ron Clapper discuss aspects of the job.*

The Engineer required that the hand rails on the top three flights of stairs must be raised to 42” high as they were too low to offer adequate safety measures while climbing the fire tower. Union members suggested to raise all of the hand rails to a uniform 42” high and then install a mid-rail half way between the decking and top rail.



*Ironworkers installing new hand and mid-rails.*

By installing the new mid-rails the railings of each stair riser are better enclosed and they provide an additional hand rail at the perfect height for children.



*A new mid-rail on the second stair riser.*

In addition to the stair risers these mid-rails provide better support and stiffness for the wire safety meshing which wraps around each landing between the stair risers.



*Mid-rail and wire safety meshing on a landing.*

The Ironworkers completed 70% of the work on April 5<sup>th</sup> despite the best efforts of Mother Nature by providing drizzle and rain showers, gusts of wind and chilly temperatures. Several of the Ironworkers returned on June 28<sup>th</sup> to complete their portion of the job. The Ironworkers were an invaluable asset to the Chapter and the people of New York, their skill and professionalism was clearly demonstrated while performing this work.

Another structure on Beebe Hill was beginning to show signs of neglect, the “Chance of Thunder” Adirondack style lean-to along the fire tower foot trail from the Barrett Pond parking lot trail-head.



*Chapter member Eric Hepperle washing the lean-to.*



*FFLA state director Bill Starr preparing to apply the linseed oil stain to the lean-to.*

After a wash down using Ivory soap, warm water and a scrub brush, to remove years of dirt and grime, the lean-to was allowed to dry for several weeks before a mixture of boiled linseed oil was applied to the logs and roof purlins to provide a layer of protection from the elements.

The “Chance of Thunder” lean-to has become a popular stopping point for many regular day-hikers and the occasional over night camper at Beebe Hill.

With the heavy steel work completed attention then turned to installing new wire safety meshing around each landing of the fire tower.



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



*Chapter member Mark Haughwout securing stair treads.*

With the structural work on the fire tower complete the next order of business shall be to install lightning grounding conductors and Earth electrodes to the fire tower. After which the fire tower will receive a fresh coat of paint from top to bottom and the wood stair treads and wood landing decks will receive water sealant stain.

Then new window sashes will be fitted into the window openings of the fire tower cab and a new steel trap door shall also be installed on the floor of the fire tower cab.

Once the fire tower cab is secured the interior will be the next item on the list for 2009. Each fire tower was equipped with a 40" tall table, made of iron pipes, with a 30" round table top which supported a 30" round topographic map of the area surrounding the fire tower. Compass azimuth ticks encircled the edge of these maps and neighboring fire towers were identified with a smaller compass ring. By using a sighting alidade the Forest Fire Observer would sight in a smoke to obtain the compass bearing from the fire tower and then call that bearing in to the nearest Forest Ranger.



*1951 – Observer Helen Ellet sights in a smoke from the Dickinson Hill fire tower in Grafton, N.Y.*

One of the main objectives of the Beebe Hill Chapter of the FFLA is to provide a visitor with a glimpse into the past. People are always curious to know of how fires were accurately spotted and reported. Therefore a 40" high support table, sighting alidade and 30" circular map, specifically for the Beebe Hill fire tower, has been reproduced and will be installed in the fire tower cab. A Forest Ranger's string map will also be on hand to demonstrate how a Forest Ranger determined the exact location of a fire with the information reported by the fire towers.



To round off this experience the Observer's cabin will be the next project. Although in very good shape the cabin interior requires a good cleaning, minor window and cosmetic repairs and a fresh coat of varnish on the walls, ceiling and floor.



*Current look of the cabin interior.*

The plan is to make the cabin inhabitable for chapter members volunteering to stay over night and greet visitors to the facility. The cabin shall be set up as if an Observer were on duty and living in the cabin, by doing so the visitor may see what life was like at one of New York's fire towers. Vintage photographs will also be on display depicting the history and development of the fire tower system in New York from 1909 - 1990.

For those people not comfortable with climbing the fire tower a series of panoramic pictures illustrating the view from the fire tower will also be on display.



*A view to the southeast from the fire tower.*

Last, but not least, is the Beebe Hill Fire Tower web site which was launched in February with a tremendous amount of technical help from FFLA-NY member Julie Moran. Log on today at [www.beebehill.info](http://www.beebehill.info).