



Azure Mountain News

ure Mountain Friends

Volume 1, February 2003

A Near Ending, A New Beginning

The steel fire tower present on the summit of Azure was built in the summer of 1918 and has a history as varied as the views on an ever changing day, and as diverse as the stories of the hikers who have climbed the mountain over the last century. What follows is but a brief capsule of the closure and rebirth of an incredible part of Azure Mountain.

October of 1978: Nineteen year old Fire Observer Michael Richards of St. Regis Falls closes the Azure Mountain Fire Tower for the season. Mike has kept himself busy over the summer and early fall, maintaining the cabin and the tower, greeting hikers, and watching for fires. The phone, the radio, the binoculars, and other equipment are removed from the tower before closing it for the winter and packing away things for next year. Unknown to Mike, the tower would remain closed for over 24 years.

September of 1989: A "Fire Tower Closed" sign greets you at the trail head. The trail to the summit is quite overgrown in some places, and the tower is in severe disrepair with the bottom two sections of stairs removed to deter hikers from climbing the structure.

July of 1995: A late afternoon climb of Azure Mountain finds the picturesque caretaker cabin located near the foot of the mountain has been torn down by the Department of Environmental Conservation; the cabin also has been neglected since 1978.

August of 2001: DEC Region 5 Forest Ranger Jeff Balerno and DEC Operations staff visit Azure Mountain to identify a landing zone for a helicopter with intentions of dismantling



the fire tower and removing it from the summit. Jack Freeman of The Adirondack Mountain Club and Steven Engelhart from Adirondack Architectural Heritage are key in preventing the removal. Helpful in "saving" the Azure Mountain Fire Tower was the fact that it had just been accepted on the list of State Historical Sites, and was expected to be accepted on the National Register of Historic Places, along with six other Adirondack fire towers.

November of 2001: Under the direction and persistence of Carolyn Kaczka and Michael McLean, a public organization meeting to save the fire tower is held in St. Regis Falls. Twenty four people from all over the North Country agree to create and represent the Azure Mountain Friends. Jack Freeman, author of Views from on High, Fire Tower Trails in the Adirondacks and Catskills, released in July 2001, presents a wonderful slide show during the meeting. Strong support is received from the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, and Adirondack Architectural Heritage agrees to become our non-profit sponsor.

March of 2002: The \$15,000 fund raising effort to restore the tower is officially launched in St. Regis Falls.

June of 2002: With persistence from Ranger Jeff Balerno and planning and help from Phil Johnstone of DEC Operations, seven helicopter flights transport three and one half tons of construction materials to the summit. Five Rangers and seventeen Azure Mountain Friends help load and unload the material, the majority of which was donated by local businesses. Special thanks to Dwyer's Home Improvement Center in North Bangor, Merriman's Lumber in Norwood, and Bicknell Lumber in Potsdam for donation of the pressure treated wood; Ned Potts Steel Fabrication in Norwood for donation of the galvanized and welded channel iron for the windows, Evans and White True Value for nuts, bolts, concrete, and numerous hardware supplies, Duquette and Son Excavation in Malone for the cobblestone, Foothills Forest Products in Nicholville for cedar logs, and to Phil Johnstone for finding much needed spare stair risers, a roof panel, and other fire tower parts necessary for the restoration.

July of 2002: Rangers Jeff Balerno and Christine Blanchard, Phil Johnstone, Six AmeriCorp Volunteers, (Wayne Larsen, Nick Rogers, Liv Rand, Massey Burke, Sarah Auer, and Molly Snedden) and numerous Azure Mountain Friends and volunteers perform extensive work

on the tower, including: entire wood structure (stairs, landings, and cab floor) replaced and secured with new hardware; poured/repared concrete pad for stairs and one support leg; missing hand rails/stair risers replaced; new channel iron windows installed in cab; wooden railing installed in cab; entire tower painted; and extensive cedar steps installed to curb erosion, summit vegetation work completed.



August and September of 2002: Work on the fire tower continues, including: damaged roof panel removed and replaced with reconditioned panel; fencing replaced and secured with staples/wire; water bars installed above cedar step work to reroute water; 3 tons of stone (one ton flown and two tons hauled by hikers) on summit being used for soil erosion prevention; summit areas seeded and brushed in; and a new cedar ceiling installed in tower cab.

As of December 2002: The Azure Mountain Fire Tower remains "officially" closed until the tower is inspected by a DEC Structural Engineer. Structural members and cross bracing on the tower may need replacement, as identified on Mount Arab, Poke-O-Moonshine, and other Adirondack fire towers. This required replacement has yet to be performed on these towers, and these towers are open and accessible to the public. A climb of Azure Mountain over the last few months found and in the future will find hikers enjoying tower access and the incredible 360 degree views of the Adirondack North County. Michael McLean, AMF Co-chair



Helicopter on the Summit, June 26, 2002

A Word from AARCH



Adirondack Architectural Heritage (AARCH) is pleased to be the nonprofit sponsor of the Azure Mountain Friends. In a relatively short time, the Friends have shown their ability to get organized, to generate community enthusiasm and support for their project, and to undertake many important first steps. We congratulate the Friends on all their great work and look forward to working with all of you over the next few years.

Our support of the Azure Mountain Friends is but one of several things that AARCH is doing to ensure that the region's fire towers are appreciated and cared for now and well into this century. We are the nonprofit sponsors for three other fire tower preservation projects. Under our auspices, the Friends of Poke-O-Moonshine have been working since 1997 to restore the fire tower on Poke-O-Moonshine Mountain in Essex County and to undertake other educational and improvement projects there. Trail improvement has been ongoing and, in 2001, the Friends published a full-color trail guide for the mountain. The Friends of Mt. Arab has restored both the fire tower and observer's cabin on Mt. Arab in the Franklin County town of Pierceland. They've also had a summit guide on the mountain for the past several summers. We've also just recently become the sponsor of the newest fire tower preservation group, the Friends of Bald Mountain, who are taking on the restoration of Bald (also called Rondaxe) Mountain in Herkimer County.

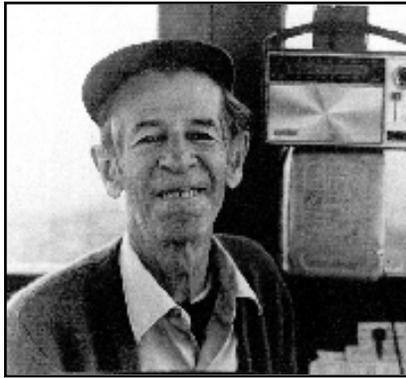
AARCH has also helped to broaden the public's appreciation of the region's fire towers by getting them placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2001, by sponsoring a new video documentary (in progress), and through publications.

AARCH's work on fire towers is one of our many activities. AARCH is the regional, nonprofit, historic preservation organization for the Adirondack Park, with a mission to further better public understanding, appreciation and stewardship of the Adirondacks' architectural heritage and unique communities through education, advocacy, technical assistance, and direct action. AARCH's regular activities include: sponsoring a series of summer and fall tours to historic places throughout the Park; holding workshops; giving educational slide presentations; publishing a biannual Newsletter; and providing technical assistance to homeowners, municipalities, businesses and other organizations. AARCH seeks to find solutions for endangered historic or architectural resources and, for example, was largely responsible for getting the state to change its twenty-year policy of neglect toward Camp Santanoni in the Town of Newcomb. Since then AARCH has overseen planning work, ongoing restoration and a summer interpretive program there through the Friends of Camp Santanoni. AARCH also maintains a growing resource center at its offices in Keeseville. The collec-

tion includes books, other publications, clippings, correspondence and other printed material, photographs, and a collection of more than 5000 slides. Steven Engelhart, Exec. Dir., AARCH

Do you have any historic photos or stories to share? Please contact the AMF (photos would be returned)

Earl Forkey,
Azure Observer
1970-6



Dollars, Donations, & Dedication Equals Restoration

The Azure Mountain Friends officially launched their \$15,000 fund raising effort on the evening of March 22, 2002 in St. Regis Falls. Marty Podskoch, author of *Fire Towers of the Catskills, Their History and Lore*, presented a slide show/talk on his research of the history of the 57 or so fire towers that once stood on Adirondack summits. Twenty three of the towers still remaining are presently available to the hiking public though some are unsafe to climb. Albany filmmaker, Mike Camoin, presented a fourteen minute video on his Adirondack fire tower history project.

News releases were sent to newspapers all across the North Country announcing this March event as the start of the Friends' formal fund raising effort. Several hundred letters, with our AMF fund raising brochure, were mailed to individuals identified as those who might have a special interest in seeing the Azure Mountain fire tower preserved and restored. Support was also sought from a number of local businesses.

The AMF brochure reads: "The Azure Mountain Friends have a vision....Restore & maintain the tower for safe public use. Protect summit environment through educational awareness and preventative soil erosion strategies. Develop an educational component that highlights the mountain's human history & natural features. Place volunteer interpreters on the summit on some spring, summer & fall weekends. Maintain & improve the present trail & parking lot."

This vision was outlined as the goals that the AMF wished to pursue and willingly agreed to commit to in the five-year Adopt-A-Natural Resource Stewardship Agreement that we submitted to the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation. This agreement was signed by both parties on January 11, 2002.

The response on the part of our Azure Mountain friends from sixteen states and two countries during the past ten months, as well as marvelous support from a variety of organizations and businesses with their cash and material donations, has led to a result far exceeding our fondest hopes. Treasurer, David Petrelli, reports that to date 164 individuals and 28 businesses and organizations have donated in excess of \$22,000 in cash and material gifts.

Our fund raising effort received an incredible kick-off with the April donation of \$10,000 from J. Patrick Barrett and his wife Christine. Pat Barrett, who grew up in St. Regis Falls graduating from the local high school, has been a most generous benefactor to his boyhood community in recent years. When approached regarding the Azure tower restoration effort about to begin, Pat and Christine became immediate supporters.

Support began well before the official start of fund raising. Amy Fields' third grade class at the Lisbon Central School decided to share the proceeds of their popcorn sale with us. Early donations also came from four chapters of the Adirondack Mountain Club (ADK). Special thanks are extended to the Nicholville Telephone Company as they were our very first "business" donor. Phil and Dolly Leroux, through their business the Leroux Oil Company, enthusiastically sponsored the printing of 4000 AMF fund raising brochures, designed by AMF member Sandy Hildreth (who also created the logo). The list of organizational and business friends, whom we wish to acknowledge for their assistance and thank publicly, follows.

Organizations: Adirondack 46ers; Lisbon Central School; Black River Chapter ADK; Forest Fire Lookout Association; Laurentian Chapter ADK; North Woods Chapter ADK; Shatagee Woods Chapter ADK; St. Regis Falls (SRF) Central School District; SRF Historians Association Newsletter (Judy Wever, Editor); SRF Teachers Association; SRF Volunteer Fire Department; The Best Sportsmen's Club; The John F. Reagan Camp Fund; The Stony Brook Club, Inc.

Businesses: Azure Mountain Power Corporation (Wadhams), Debra & Michael White - Evans & White True Value (Potsdam), Dwyer's Home Improvement Center (North Bangor), Edward Duquette & Son Excavation (Malone), Edward R. Potts, Jr. - Steel Fabrication (Norwood), Timothy Kelly - Foothills Forest Products (SRF), Randy & Kimberly Sixberry - Great Northern Screenprinting & Design (Potsdam), Image 10 (Potsdam), John E. Harvey's Gasoline Alley (Malone), Leroux Oil Company (Fort Covington), Merriman's Inc. (Norwood), Niagara Mohawk, Nicholville Telephone Company, Inc., St. Regis Falls Quick Stop, The Bicknell Corporation (Potsdam), Tisdell Associates (Canton).

Carolyn Kaczka,
AMF Co-chair

THANK YOU ONE & ALL!

What's in Store for 2003?

Publish and distribute the first AMF newsletter.

Develop a Summit Interpreters Guide to be used by AMF volunteers and made available to schools and organizations.

Create an educational trail brochure to be available in the trailhead register box.

Maintain the tower in its present "sparkling" state.

Maintain and continue to improve the Azure trail.

Undertake any structural changes that the New York State DEC may require.

Celebrate with an "official" Tower Opening event when the NYSDEC gives its final approval.

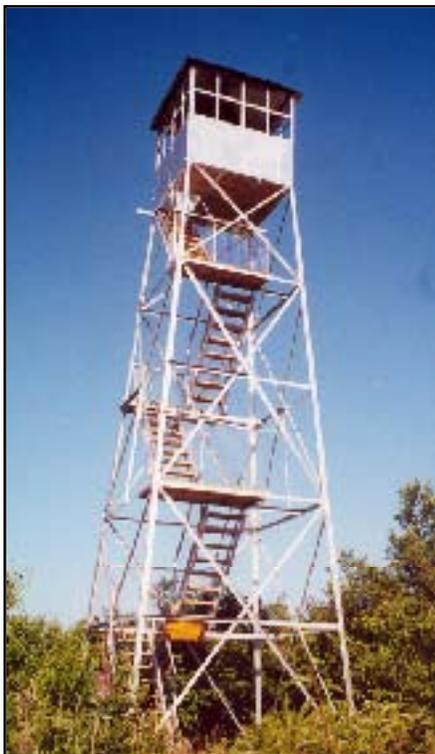


3" Patches of AMF Logo are for sale for \$3.00 Send \$ with self addressed stamped envelope to AMF, P.O. Box 95, St. Regis Falls, NY 12980-0095

AZURE MOUNTAIN FRIENDS EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Brasher Falls	Wendy Wais
Bloomington	Jeff Balerno, Forest Ranger
Hannawa Falls	Carolyn Kaczka (Co-Chair) Gene Kaczka
Keeseville	Steven Engelhart, AARCH
Lake Placid	Peggy MacKellar
Malone	Darrell Helms Marlene Nadeau David Petrelli (Treasurer)
Nicholville	Duncan & Lois Cutter Dale Pondysh
Norwood	Sandra Hildreth
Potsdam	Tom Ortmeyer
St. Regis Falls	Michael Bailey, Town Supervisor Kent & Denise Goodrow Mike McLean (Co-Chair) Pamela McLean Brad Meacham Peter Oshier Ernie Parker Mike Richards
Winthrop	Ron Chorba (Secretary)

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