



Azure Mountain News

Azure Mountain Friends

Volume 2, April 2005

“Restoration Celebration: A Near Ending - A New Beginning” September

Nearly forty very happy people hiked to the Azure summit on a comfortable sunny, though very windy, early fall day. Peter Papura, band director at St. Regis Falls Central School, began the ceremony with his trumpet solo, “America the Beautiful,” and the crowd joined in song. AMF Co-Chairs, Carolyn Kaczka and Mike McLean, welcomed Azure’s friends and thanked them for sharing in the day’s events, celebrating the mountain’s “human and natural history.” Mike and Carolyn took turns introducing the ‘specially’ invited guests who shared personal perspectives about the mountain, its 85 year old tower, and the recent tower ‘restoration.’

Summit speakers:

Tom Martin – DEC Region 5, Regional Forester. Initially involved in the ‘planned’ removal of the Azure tower, Tom became a supporter of the effort to ‘restore’ it, once assured that a Friends group was forming.

Jeff Balerno – Forest Ranger 1, DEC Region 5. It was Jeff who ‘expertly’ guided the actual restoration work marshalling the help of fellow Rangers, the State Police helicopter, AMF committee members and then supervising and working right alongside the six marvelous young AmeriCorps workers in July 2002.



Jack Freeman – Director of Outreach and Research for the Adirondack Mountain Club (ADK), involved in the fire tower restoration movement since the early nineties, and a Friends “mentor” for many groups including Azure. Author of *Views from on High: Fire Tower Trails in the Adirondacks and Catskills*.

Doug Egeland – Naturalist, Historian & Steward of Azure Mountain while a St. Regis Falls resident, 1977-2000. A large portion of the content of our 45 page Fire Tower Interpreter’s Guide (2003) contains Doug’s Azure ‘research.’

Michael Bailey – Town of Waverly Supervisor, Azure Mountain Friends committee member and relative of former Azure Observer, Lawrence Bailey (1956-1969).

Jim Camp – His Grandfather, Burt Camp, and Uncle, Lymond “Jim” Camp, ‘collectively’ served as Azure Mountain area Forest Rangers for 51 years. [This event provided a ‘reunion’ for Jim and his childhood friend, Neal Burdick.]

Katelin Isaacson – Katelin, age 12, represented the Lemieux family. Back in 1934, the 535 acre Azure Mountain land parcel was purchased by the state from Paul Lemieux. Her grandmother, Joan Lemieux Isaacson is Paul Lemieux’s granddaughter.

Neal Burdick – Noted Adirondack writer and editor has written eloquently of Azure Mountain. A brief paragraph from a Burdick essay appears on the

back of our AMF Fire Tower Interpreter’s card. [“On top of Azure Mountain, precariously near the brink of its southwest face, sits an immense boulder. Nearby upon the true summit of the mountain stands a fire observers tower. A tower and a rock – man and nature. To trace Adirondack history is to trace man’s relationship with nature.”]

Mike Richards – Azure’s ‘last’ fire observer (1977–1978) expressed his delight over the tower’s restoration saying “I never thought I would be back up here again.” Twenty-five years had elapsed since fall 1978 when Mike closed the Azure tower for what became the ‘final’ time. He was the last of twelve Observers who tended the tower during its 60 years of ‘active’ service.



Just before 11 a.m. to the cheers of the crowd, Mike Richards cut the red, white and blue ribbon ‘officially’ re-opening the Azure tower. Mike McLean then

climbed the tower stairs with an American flag. With the flag dramatically framed by the very blue sky and flapping briskly in the winds, Pete Papura concluded our summit celebration playing the “Star Spangled Banner” – it was a never to be forgotten moment!

The events of the day continued with a barbeque at the SRF Fire Department and concluded at the SRF Adult Center. Many who climbed to the summit and others who were unable to make the climb were treated to a special video filmed by Sandy Hildreth during the morning’s summit celebration - the next ‘best’ thing to being there. DEC personnel, Tom Martin and Jeff Balerno, again offered their comments as did Jack Freeman (ADK) and Michael Bailey, Town of Waverly Supervisor. Representing Adirondack Architectural Heritage, our very important non-profit sponsor, was AARCH board member, Neil Seymour, Director of Tourism for Franklin County.

Maurice Camp, son of Burt Camp, brother of Lymond “Jim” Camp, and father of Jim Camp delighted the audience with a few of his ‘numerous’ Azure stories. Joan Lemieux Isaacson, whose grandfather, Paul Lemieux, was a long time store owner in St. Regis Falls, recounted the tale of how he had sold the Azure land parcel to the state with a ‘handshake.’ Carlisle Van Duesen, D.V.M., Blue Mountain Road camp owner, and friend of forest rangers and observers through many decades expressed his happiness with the day’s activities and on Oct. 4, 2003, at age 82, climbed Azure Mountain once again accompanied by his daughter and her friends.

Concluding this full and very happy day in the history of Azure Mountain was the cutting of a marvelous sheet cake decorated by Sandy Hildreth with the special Restoration logo. At last, this very full day spent ‘celebrating’

the Azure Mountain fire tower restoration had come to an end!

The Azure Mountain Friends would like to thank ALL of you who participated in the *Restoration Celebration Day*. Obviously this 'little' mountain, located in the northwest corner of the Adirondack Park, in Franklin County, along with its fire tower, means something very 'special' to all of us.

[Jack Freeman sent an email on September 29 saying: "Azure Mountain Friends pulled out all the stops for the dedication and formal re-opening of the restored Azure Mountain fire tower. It was truly a grand occasion."]

Carolyn Kaczka, AMF Co-Chair

An Observer's Reminiscence

I was the Observer for several weeks late in the fall of 1955. I had relieved Earl Johnston (Observer, 1946-55) who had heart problems. I have always enjoyed the outdoors, so it was a good filler job for me. The cabin was great. I was a serious Brooklyn Dodger fan in those days, and had a unique experience getting the final score of the 1955 World Series. The Dodgers and the Yankees were usually in the Series and the Yankees always won. The day of the last Series game, we lost power at the mountain including the phones, so I had no way of knowing how badly my beloved Dodgers lost this time.

Jim Camp (Forest Ranger, 1953-72) was my supervisor, and that day we had business at the fish hatchery near Paul Smiths. Apparently, although he was not a baseball fan, Jim sensed he wasn't going to get much work out of me until I knew the score. He stopped the truck and climbed a telephone pole and somehow hooked in to get the score! He shouted down to me that the game was over and the score was six to zero. I was sure the Yankees had won again, until Jim said the winning pitcher was Johnny Podres; he was a Dodger, and they had finally beaten the Yankees.

I had the pleasure to revisit the mountain two summers ago with my fifteenth year old grandson. We had a great hike. It's a special place. Thanks to Beth and Peter Isaacson, I wear my Azure Mountain shirt proudly in Virginia.

Best regards, Jim Lemieux



Attention Teachers!

Many school and youth groups take advantage of Azure's relatively short hike (1 mile) and fantastic views throughout the year. The Azure Mountain Friends would be happy to try to make arrangements for a volunteer to join your group on the summit to provide information about the human and natural history of the mountain. We also might be able to help you develop a classroom lesson that would fit in with your curriculum, meet New York State educational standards, and introduce your students to the concepts of responsible recreation. For more information contact: Sandy Hildreth, shildreth@adelphia.net or 518-891-1388.

AARCH/ADK Fire Tower Conference

It was 5:30 am on one of those fall days that we North Country folk treasure, when four Azure Mountain Friends (AMF) departed for the Silver Bay Association YMCA Conference Center on Lake George to discuss Adirondack fire towers. Because of the broad range of community support it received, the speed with which the tower was restored, and the quality of the programs it developed, the Azure Mountain Friends has garnered praise and commendation from several bodies involved in fire tower restoration. In fact, some of the Friends activities were being suggested as a model to other groups that had been formed to preserve their local fire towers.

When Adirondack Architectural Heritage (AARCH) and the Adirondack Mountain Club (ADK) joined forces to sponsor a day long conference on October 24, 2004 entitled "Adirondack Fire Towers: Past, Present and Future" they invited Azure Mountain Friends to present their experience on "Involving the Whole Community" and "DEC's Important Role". AMF Executive Committee Co-Chairs Carolyn Kaczka and Mike McLean agreed to discuss community support, while AMF Committee member and DEC Ranger Jeff Balerno agreed to explain the DEC's support of our restoration. AMF Committee member Sandy Hildreth pulled together both efforts into an integrated professional PowerPoint presentation.

The conference drew together an impressive array of speakers and Steven Engelhart, AARCH's Executive Director (also an AMF Committee member) served as the conference moderator. He began the day by focusing on three speakers who have generated a significant amount of research and writing on New York State fire towers.

Wesley H. Haynes, best known for his work on the Adirondack Great Camps, shared his research on the fire towers located in the Adirondack and Catskill parks. His essay, "A Room with a View," published in *Views from on High* provides a fairly detailed history of the towers. Marty Podskoch, who authored two books dealing with the social history of fire towers (his soon to be published third book dealing with fire towers of the northern Adirondacks will include Azure Mountain), followed Haynes. Podskoch regaled the audience with tales and role-plays that captured some of the experiences in the lives of fire tower observers and forest rangers. Jack Freeman (author of *Views from on High*) reviewed the history of events that fostered the current fire tower movement. He specifically addressed the role of the Adirondack Mountain Club in encouraging fire tower restoration and educating the public about fire towers. The Fire Tower Challenge, that is sponsored by the Glens Falls-Saratoga ADK chapter, has done a great deal to encourage interest in hiking to fire tower mountains.

Freeman then shifted gears turning the focus on successful Friends groups. The first efforts at Blue and Hadley Mountains beginning in 1993 helped to focus attention to the potential for restoring towers throughout the Forest Preserve and initiated a process for other restoration projects. DEC Forest Ranger Greg George shared lessons learned from the DEC's role at Blue and Snowy Mountains. The Azure Mountain presentations demonstrated how we had learned from these early experiences, developed strong partnerships between many parts of the surrounding communities and the DEC, and the innovations we introduced to the restoration process. Closing out the morning, Supervising Forester Mike Curley discussed progress on the Vanderwacker tower restoration.

Erin Crotty, New York State's Environmental Conservation Commissioner shared some unanticipated fire tower preservation news in her keynote luncheon address. Conservation easements recently granted by International

Paper would allow access to the Loon Lake Mountain (Franklin County) and the Stillwater (Herkimer County) fire towers. The Tahawus Tract purchase from the National Lead Company would allow both the Mount Adams fire tower and Model 1922 observer's cabin to be preserved. The DEC had already brushed out the trail and begun repairs to the tower.

In the afternoon's session, David Thomas Train discussed some land acquisition efforts and interpretation by the Friends of Poke-O-Moonshine and Richard Bentley of the Friends of Mt. Arab, Pat Whalen, DEC Supervising Forester, and Mike Wilson of SUNY Potsdam described a partnership using college students to serve as full time interpreters on Mt. Arab. Author Paul Laskey (*The Fire Observation Towers of New York State*) provided an update on preservation activities around the state.

A roundtable discussion titled "The Long Term Future of New York State's Fire Towers" concluded the conference. The panelists were Peter Bauer of the Residents Committee to Protect the Adirondacks, Helen Budrock of the Catskill Center for Conservation, Jack Freeman, ADK, David Petrelli, AMF Treasurer and Committee member and Charles Vandrei, NYSDEC, Historic Preservation Officer. Like the rest of the conference, the discussion went smoothly until the future of towers on St. Regis and Hurricane Mountains arose. While Freeman and Bauer were advocates of towers in general, they returned to the two conditions for the preservation of fire towers mentioned at the start of the day: they must be "permitted uses," and they must be on summits that would lack a view without the towers. In the opinion of Freeman and Bauer, these two towers failed to meet either criterion in that both mountains afford excellent views without the towers and neither conforms to the land designation of their location. Petrelli, an advocate for saving the St. Regis tower, and Podskoch spoke in opposition, citing the towers as local landmarks and symbols of local culture. Adirondack Park Agency member Rick Weber helped close the meeting on a positive footing, pointing out that "We think of the park as huge, but it isn't. It's very limited. And within those limits, we have to respect the different views of those who love it." On that note, the final session concluded. The AMF contingent gathered up our paraphernalia and headed back over the mountains after a very productive conference.

Gene Kaczka, AMF Committee member

Azure Mountain Friends "Artist in Residence"

If Sandy Hildreth had not moved to the North Country, and if she had not taken the plunge and begun capturing in watercolor and oils the Adirondack scenes she loved, where would we be looking for art to resonate with our own feelings for the Adirondacks? And without Sandy, the Azure Mountain Friends cause might never have connected so effectively with the public.

According to Azure Mountain Friends co-chair Carolyn Kaczka, "Her artistic talent, computer design expertise, and people skills permit her to 'do it all'. She has contributed in all facets of the Azure Mountain Friends' efforts to restore the tower. We have Sandy to thank for the professional look given to all of our outreach and fund raising activities."

Sandy herself would deny playing such a significant role in AMF activities, maintaining that it was always teamwork that characterized the organization's success. Nevertheless, when you consider the many contributions Sandy has made, you see that she is a very special team player.

Sandy created both the black and white and color AMF logo; designed the AMF fund raising brochure, the AMF patch, sweatshirts and tee shirts

with the AMF logo; both volumes of the Azure Mountain News; the 51 page Interpreter's Guide; the AMF Fire Tower card which volunteer interpreters sign and give to children climbing Azure Mountain as well as to interested adults; designed the "Restoration Celebration" logo and invitations, special celebration tee shirts and then decorated a large sheet cake with this celebration logo (Sandy works in many art forms); assisted in the tower's actual restoration, wielding a paint brush here, too; participated in most Azure work days – climbing the mountain twice in one day to supply the AmeriCorps workers with needed paint thinner; volunteered the past two years as a fire tower interpreter; videotaped the Restoration Celebration on the Azure Mountain summit, edited it, and produced a movie to show at the afternoon gathering, making it available as a VHS tape and a DVD; worked with Forest Ranger Jeff Balerno and AMF co-chairs Carolyn Kaczka and Mike McLean to put words and photos together in a PowerPoint presentation titled "Involving the Whole Community/DEC's Important Role", which told the Azure restoration story and was shown at the Fire Tower Conference in Lake George in October 2004.



For Sandy, it all started when she picked Azure as a mountain near home for a short hike. It was a good match. She came back many times, twice to camp overnight on the summit to catch the stunning colors of the sunrise which inspired the Azure Mountain patch.

Once, while coming down the trail after lingering late on the summit, she was surprised to meet a black bear near the picnic table at the site of the former observer's cabin. They looked one another over, gave the traditional Blue Mountain Road nod, and quietly went their own ways. That special experience, plus the tales she was hearing from the many people who loved the mountain, reinforced her decision to use the gifts she has, her artistic abilities, to help the organization.

Sandy's paintings can be seen on her web site: SandraHildreth.com, and at the Adirondack Artists Guild Gallery in Saranac Lake.

Duncan Cutter, AMF Committee Member

Azure's Volunteer Interpreter Program, Two Years Old and Growing

The Volunteer Fire Tower Interpreter Program was launched in 2003. On June 7, Ron Chorba climbed to the top of Azure Mountain on a warm and drizzly spring day and greeted the seventeen hikers who visited the summit that day. Ron holds the honor of being our first official Azure Mt. volunteer interpreter. He and eleven other volunteers spent a total of twenty-six days greeting over 1000 hikers, promoting the protection of the summit and tower and trying to answer a variety of questions about the history of the tower, the mountain and the surrounding environment. They also reported a number of unanticipated experiences. One volunteer was treated to the music of bongo drums. Another enjoyed the spectacle of 4th of July fireworks from several villages. Still another volunteer accompanied class trips from St. Regis Falls. Several enjoyed snacking on and gathering some of the mountain's late summer bounty of blueberries. Many spotted wildlife

and some met new friends, but all were treated to the changing mountain views and moods. 2003 marked an enjoyable and successful start for our Volunteer Interpreter Program.

The 2004 season was kicked off on May 29, 2004 by Sandy Hildreth. She climbed Azure on a cold, windy, and clear day with spectacular views and greeted thirty-six hikers. The number of volunteers, 19 in 2004, marked an increase of more than 50% over 2003. They greeted more than 1400 hikers on twenty-seven days. From bugs to thunder storms, from bears to turkey vultures, from barefoot Mennonite lasses to a wedding engagement, and from the large crowds on Columbus Day to the final day of solitude, snow and hail, 2004 was another successful year to remember.

What does a volunteer interpreter do?

The first task facing the volunteer interpreter is to pick a weekend day (some choose more than one) between Memorial Day and Columbus Day. Then contact me (518-524-0182) to reserve the date. On the morning of your selected day, stop at the AMF cache, located close to the trailhead, to pick up the items you will carry to the summit (for example, an American Flag for the cab), then drive to the trailhead. Once you climb to the mountain top the fun begins. There will be the opportunity to greet visitors and share information about the mountain and tower. To help volunteers become more familiar with the mountain and its history, each is given a fire tower interpretive guide before hand. You can also help us fund raise by carrying t-shirts and patches that may be sold to visitors. There will be time to do some light trail work such as spreading grass seed on erosion areas or picking up trash. Volunteers are also asked to observe and to record things they see on a log sheet; i.e., the number of hikers they meet, the weather, the trail and tower work needed, wildlife seen, or any other noteworthy occurrences. Most importantly, you should enjoy the experience. Typically

volunteers spend from 10 am to 4 pm, but weather and personal preference can change times accordingly.

Interested in becoming a volunteer?

Azure Mountain Friends would like to use as many interpreters as possible to cover the available dates. To facilitate the process of becoming a volunteer, we are holding an informational meeting on April 30, 2005 from 12 noon to 2 pm in the St. Regis Falls Fire Station/Community Center. Pizza will be provided to all attending. This will be an opportunity to ask questions and get answers about volunteering. We are inviting veteran volunteer interpreters and prospective interpreters and friends. In addition, weather permitting; a late afternoon hike up the mountain is planned. If you wish to attend the meeting and/or hike, would like to volunteer or know someone who would like to volunteer, or have any other questions please contact Carolyn Kaczka at (315) 265-4806 (kaczkae@northnet.org) or Mike McLean at (518) 524-0182 (mpmclean@gw.dec.state.ny.us).

Finally, I would like to thank all our volunteer interpreters to date. Very special thanks are in order to Emily Goughary and Sandy Hildreth. Each of them spent eight days on the summit. Other interpreters have included Carolyn Kaczka (7), Mike McLean (6), Ron and Holly Chorba (4), Gene Kaczka (4), Tom and Ann Ortmeier (2), David Petrelli (2), Wendy Wais (2), Neal Burdick (2), Nancy Skiff (2), Debbie White, Bob and Louise Bixby, Geri Ames, Eileen Wheeler, Duncan and Lois Cutter, and Art Johnson.

Have a wonderful year and see you on the mountain!

Michael McLean AMF Co-Chair



Azure Mountain Friends
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PIZZA PARTY APRIL 30th!

"Volunteer" Fire Tower Interpreter's Pizza Get-Together/Training Session. St. Regis Falls Fire Station. Bring your friends, get the scoop and a slice, and hopefully sign up for a day or two. An Azure hike to follow for those interested, weather permitting. 12 noon - 2 pm. RSVP Mike: 518-524-0182, (mpmclean@gw.dec.state.ny.us).



Original Azure Mountain Friends patches, t-shirts, and the new 2nd edition of the Fire Tower Interpreter's Guide are available for sale. Patches are \$3 (\$3.50 if mailed) and the book is \$6.00 (\$7.00 if mailed). The price includes sales tax. Contact Carolyn Kaczka at (315) 265-4806 (kaczkae@northnet.org). T-shirts require special arrangements.