

## SMARTS MOUNTAIN FIRE TOWER

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Smarts Mountain fire lookout tower has achieved historic lookout status through a series of lucky breaks, and through the cooperation of a number of organizations represented here today, and the efforts of many people, some of whom are now departed, whom it is appropriate to remember.

When Smarts went into service in 1915, it brought the number of lookout towers in New Hampshire to 29. The New Hampshire Forestry Commission, as it was then called, ran the show, but we note that 19 of the towers were funded by the federal government under the Weeks Act. Whether Smarts was one of the 19 isn't clear, but judging by what reports have survived, it's clear that federal-state cooperation, often at a very informal and personal level was the way things were done. It's clear from this gathering that the spirit is still alive today, eighty-one years later.

By 1922 the odds that Smarts would still be around to be a historic anything would have looked pretty poor. For one thing, in order to get good coverage, there were two towers, both of log pole construction. The summit panorama used by the lookout to locate fires was drawn by E. S. Atkinson in 1916. It shows a split view from the "east and west" towers. (In those days topographic maps weren't yet available, and the lookout depended on highway maps, a drawing of the hills he could see around him, and his own local knowledge.

Communication, by phone in those days, was always a problem; the longer the line the more likely it would go out of service. Tree limbs and wildlife had a way of breaking or damaging lines and poles and the lookout spent a good many hours tracing the wire and making repairs. The state stopped operating Smarts in about 1922 primarily because of the phone problems.

Enter another of Smarts' supporters, the Dartmouth College community. In 1923 the Bait and Bullet club took over the lookout's cabin. They used and maintained it until 1926 when they merged into the Dartmouth Outing Club. In 1925 DOC "reclaimed the cabin from the porkies" and cut a loop trail over Smarts, Moose and Cube mountains. The log book from the cabin, preserved in the Baker Library archives, names among those on the trail crew another friend, Bob Monahan (Dartmouth '29.) He is listed as "Smarts Mtn. heeler." (A 'heeler" in Club parlance was a sort of undergraduate gofer, who took on a particular club project, and might then become eligible for the "Cabin and Trail" elite status if he did well.) At this period the east tower was still visited fairly frequently, though its condition was getting pretty poor. In bug season overnight visitors often slept on top of the west tower although it too was showing its age. Sketches in the log book show an open tower, railed on three sides.

In 1929 two local teenagers showed up on the summit and took some photos. They were Claud Sharps and Dan Doan. Dan, who later graduated from Dartmouth - class of '36 - went on to write a series of guides to New Hampshire trails. He was honored shortly before his death in 1993 by having the trail to Smarts from the north, formerly the Mousley Brook trail, named for him.

By 1930 DOC took on the job of replacing the tower and the watchman's cabin. Over a hundred club members helped haul materials up the mountain. The new cabin was sited on the south facing bluff and had a long front gable which served as a porch roof. This must have made a very attractive and convenient shelter, but there was a problem with the design, as the club discovered in the winter of 1937-8. A gust of storm wind came up under the gable and blew most of the roof off.

Next September the hurricane of 1938 took out a lot more than cabin roofs. After the wide spread damage to the forests across the state, fire lookouts went back on the high priority list. There were also money and manpower available in quantity to clean up and restore fire station facilities. New England Forest Emergency funds paid for 5 new steel towers, one of them on Smarts, and the CCC provided the crews to build them and the access trails and phone lines. The towers were made by the International Derrick Company; they came with numbered parts and the height could be anything up to 180 feet: one worked from the top down to order the necessary steel. Smarts was 41 feet tall, with steps instead of the former ladder. A new watchman's cabin was built with a woodshed

and toilet, and the new phone line -- # 12 galvanized wire with a "French hand set" -- ran 4 1/2 miles to the valley.

Of the other International Derrick towers, Warner Hill is still in operation, though much modified. Miller Park is standing, without its cab, Craney is standing, out of service, and Sam's Hill has been torn down. A tower, built from the same plans, at the new NH Historical Society Museum in Concord, is probably the world's only firetower-under-glass, completely enclosed in the Stone Warehouse.

By 1942 Smarts was out of service again, in part because of wartime manpower shortages. DOC moved into the watchman's cabin soon afterward and paid the state a dollar a year in lease fees for the next several years.

In 1951 the NH Division of Forests and Lands sent district chief Jim Ricard and Croydon lookout Gerald Gross up "to dismantle the tower for exhibition purposes at Springfield Mass." The log book for August 21 goes on to note "Storm's drove us out today (Thank the Lord.) Back again sometime." They did come back on November 6, and removed tools and equipment. The cabin was reported as "much improved," presumably by DOC.

In 1957 a period of high fire danger called for restaffing a number of inactive towers. Until permanent watchmen could be hired, DOC provided manpower. The DOC archive at Baker Library contains the names of the crews, and a copy of the fire lookout's handbook they were provided.

At the same time Bob Monahan, now a state legislator, spearheaded a move to get the tower reopened on a permanent basis. Before he died, Bob shared a number of stories about his forestry career with me, including one he called "Incident at the Princess; or Legislation by Recommittal or The Speech that was Never Delivered" In this article he gives an unusually detailed account of how he engineered passage of a state law requiring the Forestry Commission to repair and rehabilitate Smarts Mt. tower. This was the only time I know of when a fire tower was saved by an act of the legislature. The details are complicated, but

Bob credits his success to an expedition to a local roadhouse (the Princess) with two "retired school marms" -- fellow legislators -- at which the Smarts supporters organized a floor fight and finessed that threat into passage of the bill.

The Forestry Commission noted sourly that "the cost of moving repair materials to the tower was over \$ 1000, and the job was accomplished with great difficulty."

Smarts continued in service until 1973, and was later transferred to the Department of Public Works in 1977 for use as a radio repeater site.

When the Appalachian Trail Conference acquired the trail right of way over Smarts ownership of the land was placed with the National Park Service. Who owned the tower? And what would happen to it? I raised these questions with Kevin Peterson and Ray Auger, local ATC representatives. A series of letters in the fall of 1991 kept me posted on their progress in sorting out the ownership. The tower, owned by the state, was on International Paper Company land, and by the terms of their lease should have been torn down when the state was done with it. Fortunately once again Smarts was lucky. The state had renewed its lease in 1978 for ten years. By 1988 when the lease expired the National Park Service was the landowner. Ray was led a merry chase from one state agency to another, and when he finally found himself back where he started he was able to get everyone to agree that the tower, like the trail right of way, now fell under NPS jurisdiction. Since that agency has no presence in New Hampshire, effective jurisdiction fell to the US Forest Service.

Although there have been divergent opinions about whether or not structures should remain on the Appalachian Trail, and the purists could have demanded that the tower come down, apparently nobody noticed. It now seems that the view that these artifacts represent historic uses of the summits is gaining support, and that the placing of Smarts on the National Historic Lookout Register should help insure that the tower will remain in place.

In 1994 an interagency group convened on the tower. DOC, the ATC, the USFS, and the FFLA were all on hand; the local insect population was well represented as well. A list of needed repairs and maintenance was made, and within the next year funds were provided by the USFS and ATC; and DOC carried out the needed maintenance. So continues the

cooperative effort which keeps Smarts tower in existence.

Today we recognize Smarts Mt. Fire Lookout as a historic structure; in so doing we can't help but honor the people who have had a hand in preserving it for us. We also honor the lookouts who have watched from Smarts.

Fire lookouts on Smarts Mountain 1916-1973	
E. B. Tewksbury	1916
William P. Welch	1917-1918
Oscar Henderson	1922 (from a note in log book 1927)
Elmer Sheldon	1939-1940
H. M. Allison	1941
(not operated 1942-1957)	
DOC lookout crew 1957:	
Garrett, Cabiness, Plummer	May 9-12
John Hobbie '57, Spence Rank C&T '58, Bill van Paul '58	May 13-14
John Curran	1957-1962
Alfred James Balch	Sept. 1962-Sept. 1963
Edmond Saltmarsh	1963
Ralph Woodward	1964
Jeffrey A. Blewitt	1969
Preston Grant	1969
Gary Rosenthal	1970
Michael Murphy	1971-1973