

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties or districts. See instructions in How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to compete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name: Hurricane Mountain Fire Observation Station

other name/site number:

2. Location

street & number: Hurricane Mountain Summit

not for publication: n/a

city/town: Town of Keene

vicinity: n/a

state: New York

code: NY

county: Essex

code: 31

zip code: 12942

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide locally.

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

State or Federal agency or bureau

( See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting or other official

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:

entered in the National Register

see continuation sheet

determined eligible for the National Register

see continuation sheet

determined not eligible for the National Register

see continuation sheet

removed from the National Register

see continuation sheet

other (explain):

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

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**5. Classification**

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Ownership of Property	Category of Property	No. Resources within Property	
		Contributing	Noncontributing
<input type="checkbox"/> Private	<input type="checkbox"/> Building(s)	_____	_____ Buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> Public-Local	<input type="checkbox"/> District	_____	_____ Sites
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Public-State	<input type="checkbox"/> Site	<u>  1  </u>	_____ Structure
<input type="checkbox"/> Public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> Structure	_____	_____ Objects
	<input type="checkbox"/> Object	<u>  1  </u>	_____ Total

Name of related multiple property listing  
Fire Observation Stations of the \_\_\_\_\_  
New York State Forest Preserve \_\_\_\_\_

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National  
Register   0  

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**6. Function or Use**

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**Historic Functions:** Government: Fire Observation Station

**Current Functions:** Not in use

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**7. Description**

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**Architectural Classification:**

No Style: Utilitarian

**Materials:**

foundation:

walls:

roof:

other: Metal: Steel

**Narrative Description**

(see continuation sheet for additional information)

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark x in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

[X] A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.

[ ] B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.

[X] C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.

[ ] D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark x in all the boxes that apply.)

[ ] A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.

[ ] B removed from its original location.

[ ] C a birthplace or grave.

[ ] D a cemetery.

[ ] E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.

[ ] F a commemorative property.

[ ] G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Engineering

Recreation

Conservation

Period of Significance

1919 to 1990

Significant Dates

1919

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above.)

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

AerMotor Corporation

(manufacturer)

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

(see continuation sheets)

9. Major Bibliographic References

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- [ ] preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
[ ] previously listed in the National Register
[ ] previously determined eligible by the National Register
[ ] designated a National Historic Landmark
[ ] recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #
[ ] recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #

Primary Location of Additional Data:

- [ ] State Historic Preservation Office
[X] Other State agency (NYSDEC)
[ ] Federal agency
[ ] Local government
[ ] University
[ ] Other

Specify Repository: NYSDEC, 50 Wolf Road, Albany NY

Hurricane Mountain Fire Observation Station  
Essex County, New York

**10. Geographical Data**

Acreage of Property:

UTM References:            Zone    Easting    Northing

Legal Location (Township, Range & Section(s)):

**Verbal Boundary Description.** The boundary for the nominated site is being drawn to include a 500 foot square area of the summit surrounding the tower the trail. (See Map # 1)

**Boundary Justification.** The boundary for the nomination has been drawn to include the immediate area associated with the Hurricane Mountain Fire Observation Station's site. This area as such includes the summit area where the tower is located.

**11. Form Prepared By**

Name/title Steven C. Engelhart  
Organization Adirondack Architectural Heritage Date February 18, 2005  
Street & Number 1790 Main Street, Civic Center Suite 37 Telephone (518) 834-9328  
City or Town Keeseville State N.Y. Zip code 12944

**Additional Information**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

Photographs

**Property Owner**

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC)

street & number 625 Broadway telephone (518) 402-9428

city or town Albany state NY zip code 12233

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et seq.*)

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of the Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

## **Bibliography**

For a general bibliography, see the Multiple Property Documentation Form, Fire Observation Stations of the New York State Forest Preserve.

### **Hurricane Mountain Information from the Annual Reports**

Hurricane Mountain Station established in April 1910. No Tower, 2½ miles of telephone line struck to connect the station.

Conservation Commission: *Report for the year 1910*. Albany. The Argus Co. 1911. Pg. 26

A 35 ft. steel fire tower erected at Hurricane Mountain.

Conservation Commission: *Report for the year 1919*. Albany. J.B. Lyon Co. 1919.

The "Panoramic Map" installed in the Hurricane Mountain fire tower.

Conservation Commission: *Report for the year 1921*. Albany. J.B. Lyon Co. 1920. Pg. 109.

Observer cabin built at Hurricane Mountain

Conservation Commission: *Report for the year 1928*. Albany. J.B. Lyon Co. 1926. Pg. 112

Repairs to cabin at Hurricane Mountain

Conservation Department: *Report for the year 1935*. Albany. J.B. Lyon Co. 1935. Pg. 117

## Photographs

Hurricane Mountain Fire Observation Station  
Town of Keene, Essex County, New York

## Photographs

Photograph #1 - Tower Color view (1977)

Photograph #2 - Tower Color view (2001)



Photograph #1



## Narrative Description

The Hurricane Mountain Fire Observation Station is located at the 3,694' summit of Hurricane Mountain in the town of Keene, Essex County in the Adirondack Forest Preserve of New York State. The Fire Observation Station includes a forty foot tall, steel frame lookout tower that was erected in 1919.

The Hurricane Mountain summit is a mostly open rock face and has a commanding 360° view of the High Peaks, Jay Range, Champlain Valley, and Green Mountains (in Vermont). The boundary for the nominated property is drawn to include a 500 foot square area surrounding the tower.

The thirty-five foot tower, with a nine-foot high cab, was fabricated by the Aermotor Company. This tower is typical of the "Heavier Type" tower, with integral staircase, built by the Conservation Commission between 1917 and 1950. The structure consists of a square steel and glass "cab", with a hip roof, enclosing the observation platform atop a riveted and bolted frame of angular steel. Steel stair risers, supporting wood stair treads, divided into five flights and four landings provide access to the cab from the ground. The four tower legs are anchored by standard coupling plates atop concrete footings, placed on the exposed bedrock, and these plates are anchored into the bedrock by two ¾ inch steel threaded rods that pass through the concrete footings.

The summit and fire tower are accessed by one of three trails. From New York State 9N, the trail is 2.6 miles long and has an elevation change of 2000'. The North Trail, from the O'Toole Road, is 3 miles and has a 1600' elevation change. The trail historically used by rangers and observers approached the mountain from the east and is 2.7 miles long and has an elevation change of 1700'. The Observer's Cabin, once located on this trail where it crosses Falls Brook, was removed sometime after 1982, as was a lean-to. All that remains of the cabin site are some foundation (stone) rubble and miscellaneous pieces of wood.

The tower is relatively intact and retains most of its original integrity. The treads from the lower two sections of stairs have been removed, as has one (steel) stringer from the first/lowest flight of stairs. The wood from the lowest landing has been removed, there are no windows in the tower cab, and a section of the tower cab roof (west side) has been torn off. The steel structure has some rust but, otherwise, the remainder of it fabric is extant.

## Statement of Significance

The Hurricane Mountain Fire Observation Station is a component in the multiple property submission, Fire Observation Stations of the New York State Forest Preserve. It was identified as a historic resource in an unpublished inventory prepared by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) in 1991. Subsequently, with assistance from the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation (NYSOPRHP), and Historic Preservation, Field Services Bureau, the Hurricane Mountain Fire Observation Station was identified as meeting the criteria for listing on the State/National Register of Historic Places. Additional contextual information can be found in the Multiple Documentation Form, in the following sections: Sections E:1A Recreation and Conservation in the Adirondacks and Catskills before the Forest Preserve, 1830-1885; E:1D Rethinking Forest Fire Protection, 1909-1915; E:1F Conservation as a Social Service: Managing Recreation and Resource Protection with Fire Observation Stations, 1915-1930; E:2B Temporary Fire Observation Stations, 1909-1916; E:2C Standardized Fire Observation Stations, 1916-1932; E:2D Impacts of the CCC and World War II, 1933-1950; E:2E Decommissioning and Abandonment of the Fire Observation Stations, 1951-1991; and E:2F Adoption and Preservation of the Fire Observation Stations, 1992-2000. Additional associated property type information can be found in Section F:1 Steel Towers; F:2 Observer Cabins and Outbuildings; F:3 Open Camps and Lean-tos; and F:4 Trail and Road Features of the Multiple Property Documentation Form.

The Hurricane Mountain Fire Observation Station is significant under National Register Criteria A and C for its association with the New York State Forest Preserve and as a representative example of an early 20<sup>th</sup> century fire observation tower.

## History

The summit of Hurricane Mountain (3,694') was used as a station during the Verplanck Colvin survey in June of 1876. A wooden pole survey tower was erected at this time. In the rock on the north side of the current fire observation tower are several wrought iron eyes that Colvin used to anchor the survey tower.



The Grand Thendolite being carried up Hurricane Mountain. Colvin's sketch makes it hard to believe that it weighed 300 pounds. (Chevont Report)

During the early 1900s fires occurred in the Town of Keene Valley, west of Hurricane Mountain. One fire in 1903 swept north from North Hudson and burned the peak of Noonmark. The fire threatened St. Huberts, Keene Valley and Keene. To protect St. Huberts 250 men dug a trench around the property. (<sup>1</sup> Edith Pilcher, *Up the Lake Road, The First Hundred Years of the Adirondack Mountain Reserve*, 1987, p. 88.) The Forest Fish and Game Commission responded by establishing a lookout station on the bald summit of Hurricane Mountain in April 1910. The observer watched for wisps of smoke in the Giant Mountain wilderness to the south and the Keene Valley to the west. State workers strung 2 ½ miles of telephone wire to the summit.. The total cost for the station was \$216.64. (<sup>2</sup> *Forest Fish and Game Commission Report 1910*, Albany: 1911, p. 26.) The first observer, Joseph Denton, reported three fires in 1910. The next year, Matthew Ryan

reported 22 fires. (<sup>3</sup> Conservation Commission Report 1911, Albany: 1912, p. 41)

For the first decade there wasn't a wooden tower like there was on most Adirondack mountains because the observer had a clear view in all directions. The last observer on Hurricane Mountain, Doug Richards, said that when his father was a young boy he used to go up with Archie Hayes, the observer from 1915 to 1919 and there wasn't a tower then. His grandfather and Archie sat on the cliffs and watched for smoke. When he saw smoke, Archie would call the ranger. The telephone was in a wooden box and the line lay right on the rocks.

S. P. Morgan, resident manager of Champlain Realty Company in Plattsburgh, in a letter dated April 27, 1917 to Dist. Forest Ranger A. I. Vosburgh, stated, "I am not sure whether our company owns the summit of Hurricane Mountain, but if we do, you are certainly very welcome to construct an observation station on our land for use in your fire service, and use such timber as suggested by you for the construction of same, and should there be not enough of such timber to build a suitable station you are permitted to use other timber for its construction assuming that you will use good judgment in so doing." This might indicate that there wasn't a log tower on the mountain and the company was giving them permission to build one.

In 1919 the state built a thirty-five-foot steel tower to give the observer a better view and protection from the weather. The tower was an Aermotor Model 40 steel tower, which stands just under 40' in height. The tower was one of thirteen new steel towers erected that year in the state and was one of the heavier type towers, equipped with steel stairs. The other twelve towers erected that year were: Twaddle Point, Bald Mountain, Tooley Pond Mountain, Beaver Lake Mountain, Moose River Mountain, Stillwater Mountain, Boreas Mountain, Mt. Morris, Whiteface Mountain, Owl's Head Mountain, Crane Mountain, and High Point Mountain. Practically all the labor in erecting these towers was performed by members of the ranger force. The average cost, including purchase, of erecting a tower was about \$530, not including ranger labor. An Osborne Fire Finder, a type of panoramic map for use with an alidade, was installed in the cab in 1921.

Several Observer's Cabins were built on Hurricane Mountain. The first, a simple log structure, was erected in 1916 and used for one year. In 1917, a new cabin was built. The Conservation Report of 1928 stated that state workers built a new standard size cabin on Hurricane Mountain (see photo below). This cabin was 12'x16' and was roofed and sided with asphalt shingles. This cabin was demolished sometime after 1982.



*The 1928 Observer's Cabin on Hurricane Mountain, As it appeared in 1977. Photo courtesy Bob Eshler.*

In 1935 the Conservation Department rangers or Civilian Conservation Corps employees constructed new trails, from the north and south, to the fire tower. (<sup>4</sup> Conservation Department Report 1935, Albany: 1936, p.119)

The state officially closed the tower in 1979 because the DEC was using air surveillance. In 1987, the DEC declared the fire tower surplus property. In December 1995, DEC Region 5 Director of Natural Resources Thomas Wahl recommended the fire tower be dismantled and removed due to its inaccessibility and remote location. He estimated it would cost \$5,400 to use a state helicopter to remove the tower from the mountain. For a variety of reasons nothing was done to remove the tower throughout the 1980s and 1990s. In 2001, DEC again announced plans to remove the tower and to reassemble it at the Washington County Fairgrounds. In response to this announcement, a large number of people protested and wrote letters advocating for its preservation. This campaign was organized by the Friends of Hurricane Mountain, who collected more than 3,000 signatures on a petition, and Adirondack Architectural Heritage, the regional historic preservation organization. The matter of its removal was tabled and is to be dealt with when a unit management plan for the Hurricane Mountain Primitive Area is developed.

## **OBSERVERS**

The following were observers on Hurricane Mountain:

Joseph Denton (1910)

Matthew Ryan (1911-15)

Archie Hayes (1915-19)

Milo Bronson (1919)

John Denton (1920-22)

Adam McDougal (1922-23)

William H. Potter (1924)

Kelly McDougal (1924-28)

Michael Connors (1929)

Ed "Spike" Farrell (1929-30)

Harry Denton (1931-32)

Adam McDougal (1933-35)

Harry Denton (1936-42)

George Rhone (1942)

David Passino (1942-44)

Emmett Fuller (1944-48)

Henry "Hank" B. McCoy (1949-51)

Raymond S. Cross (Aug.-Oct., 1951)

R. E. Pooler Sr., (1952)

Charles Van Fleet (1952-53)

Henry "Hank" B. McCoy (1954)

Pank Defendorff (July-Aug., 1955)

George Davis (Sept., 1955-58)

Earl Sprague (1959-65)

Robert F. Sweatt (May-June, 1966)

Ed Estes (June-Oct., 1966)

Doug Richards (1970-82)

## **RANGERS**

These forest rangers supervised the tower:

Morgan O'Donnell (1911-15)

Leonard C. Palmer (1917-19)

John Longware (1920-50)

Case P. Phinney (1951-73)

Richard "Dick" Olcott (1958-86)